

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglického jazyka a didaktiky

Filologie – anglický jazyk



Magdalena Maratová

Question tags *right* and *isn't it*: A Sociolinguistic Study

Tázací dovětky *right* a *isn't it*: socio-lingvistická studie

Diplomová práce

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Gabriela Brůhová, Ph.D.

2018

“Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.”

V Praze, dne 5.ledna 2018

.....

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům. I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Ráda bych poděkovala PhDr. Gabriele Brůhové, PhD. za odborné vedení, ochotné poskytnutí cenných rad a připomínek, vytrvalou podporu a za všechny čas, který nad mou prací strávila. Dále bych také ráda poděkovala své sestře a Boženě Valdajevě za veškerou podporu při psaní diplomové práce.

Abstract

This thesis examines question tags *right* and *isn't it* from pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives. English question tags have most frequently been analyzed from the sociolinguistic angle while at the same time completely avoiding the pragmatic aspects that represent a key factor in the sociolinguistic background. The theoretical part of the thesis introduces sociolinguistic aspects and approaches to question tags, as well as their formal aspects.

This thesis is a corpus based study (British National Corpus chosen as the primary source of material) where 200 examples were extracted from the corpus and further studied (100 examples on the question tag *right* and 100 examples on the question tag *isn't it*).

The study analyzes the question tags from the sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on the type of conversation (cross-gender or same-sex conversations) and relating the pragmatic functions of question tags to speakers' gender and speakers' age. Further, the analysis also inquires into what sentence types precede the two question tags. The paper also offers a revised classification of pragmatic functions of the two question tags.

Key words: question tags, pragmatic functions of question tags, immediate and postponed response, speaker's gender

Abstrakt

Předmětem této diplomové práce jsou tázací dovětky *right* a *isn't it*, které jsou zkoumány z pragmatické a sociolingvistické perspektivy. Historicky byly tázací dovětky častěji analyzovány ze sociolingvistického hlediska a jejich pragmatický aspekt byl zcela ignorován, ačkoliv obsahuje velmi zásadní data, která jsou relevantní k analýze i z hlediska sociolingvistického. Teoretická část této práce stručně popisuje tázací dovětky jak z formálního lingvistického hlediska, tak z hlediska sociolingvistického.

Diplomová práce je korpusovou studií a Britský národní korpus (BNC) je hlavním zdrojem dat (analýza se skládá z 200 příkladů, přičemž 100 příkladů odkazuje na tázací dovětek *right* a zbylých 100 na dovětek *isn't it*).

Analytická část této studie se zabývá tázacími dovětkami ze sociolingvistického hlediska a zaměřuje se především na typy konverzace z hlediska pohlaví mluvčích (tj. jestli jsou účastníci konverzace stejného nebo různého pohlaví). Dále jsou pragmatické funkce tázacích dovětek brány v potaz při analýze pohlaví a věku mluvčích. Analýza mimo jiné také představuje upravenou klasifikaci pragmatických funkcí obou tázacích dovětek.

Klíčová slova: tázací dovětky, pragmatické funkce tázacích dovětek, okamžitá a odložená odpověď, pohlaví mluvčího

List of abbreviations

BNC	British National Corpus
QT	Question tag
IR	Immediate response
PR	Postposed response
Ex	Example (plural form – exx)
Ibid	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place

Tables

Table 1: Overview of polarity and intonation of tag questions	16
Table 2: Gender distribution of tag questions according to Coates (2004)	22
Table 3: Summary of Cameron et al.'s (1989) study	23
Table 4: Sentence types preceding question tags.....	28
Table 5: Distribution of pragmatic functions with both question tags	30
Table 6: Direct and indirect responses' distribution with question tags	45
Table 7: Direct and Indirect distribution among pragmatic functions.....	45
Table 8: Summary of conversational types found in BNC	49
Table 9: Summary of male/female speakers	50
Table 10: Cross-gender speaker preference.....	50
Table 11: Speakers' gender	51
Table 12: Gender preferences within age groups	52
Table 13: Percentage usage of question tags within age groups.....	53
Table 14: Gender preferences of the usage of question tag right in cross-gender conversation	54
Table 15: Gender preferences of the usage of question tag isn't it in cross-gender conversation	55
Table 16: Male conversation pragmatic function preferences.....	56
Table 17: Female conversation pragmatic function preferences	56

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Question tag right.....	69
Appendix 2: Question tag isn't it.....	74

Contents

Abbreviations.....	iii
Tables.....	iv
List of appendices.....	v
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Language and Gender	3
2.1 Approaches to language and gender	4
2.1.1 Deficit approach.....	4
2.1.2 Dominance approach	5
2.1.3 Difference Approach.....	5
2.1.4 Dynamic or social constructionist approach	6
2.2 Gender differences in language use	7
2.2.1 Lakoff's perspective	7
2.2.2 Lakoff's differences in language use	8
2.3 Question tags	10
2.3.1 Rules for forming question tags according to CGEL	11
2.3.2 Tag questions following other sentence types	13
2.3.3 Invariant question tags	15
2.3.4 Question tags and intonation.....	16
2.3.5 Pragmatic functions of question tags	17
2.4 Tag questions and gender	20
3 Material and Methodology.....	24
4 Analysis.....	28
4.1 Syntactic analysis of sentences preceding question tags.....	28
4.2 Pragmatic functions.....	29
4.2.1 Epistemic modal function	31
4.2.2 Facilitative function	37
4.2.3 Softening function.....	40
4.2.4 Challenging function.....	42
4.3 Question tags and direct/indirect addressee responses.....	44
4.4 Speakers' gender	48
4.4.1 Type of conversation	49

4.4.2	Speakers' gender	49
4.4.3	Speakers' age	51
4.4.4	Gender and pragmatic functions	53
5	Conclusion	58
6	References and Sources	62
7	Resumé.....	65
8	Appendix.....	69

1 Introduction

The subjects of this study are the question tags *right* and *isn't it*. Question tags have always represented a concept on which there was no unified opinion, be it concerning their pragmatic functions or their role in sociolinguistic contexts. Sociolinguists, such as Lakoff, who first studied question tags from this perspective saw them as means to demonstrate power within conversations, however later studies have suggested that her hypothesis may be a product of her time and started to focus rather on the pragmatic aspect of question tags. Names, such as Holmes or Algeo, symbolize the greatest break-throughs in the pragmatic research on the topic. Owing to their research, linguists have commenced to divert their attention from the sociolinguistic perspective and focused on the pragmatic function of question tags, what they mean and which pragmatic functions are preferred by which gender. Lakoff's assumption that the usage of question tag is associated with power became outlived, and new theories (such as the theory that men tend to use *epistemic* functions more whereas women employ *facilitative* functions more as they are the entertainers and are inviting towards the addressees more than male speakers) were established. These theories suggest that there is a clear cut between how different genders prefer different pragmatic functions. This thesis is trying to verify that although these statements have some merit, the distinction is no longer as clear cut as it was. Also, this dissertation takes context as a key variable in the analysis and therefore takes into account whether the conversations are cross-gendered or same-sex (be it male or female conversations) as it was proved that speakers can change their conversational behavior towards the opposite sex.

The theoretical part of this thesis introduces approaches to language and gender (i.e. deficit, dominance, difference and dynamic approach) as well as gender differences in language. The section addressing gender differences is largely based on Lakoff's perspective, as she was the first linguist who contemplated about the matter, and even though she did not base her research on any academic, scientific or corpora texts, her work is still regarded to this day groundbreaking. Further, question tags and their formal aspects are explained: rules for forming question tags, which sentence types follow them, the difference between canonical and invariant question tags. The most attention in the question tag formal introduction is paid to the pragmatic functions that question tags can exhibit. Holmes' and Algeo's work represent essential resources for further analysis where a unique classification is created that takes best of both their works. Lastly, the theoretical part also addresses question tags and gender, relying largely on Coates' (2004) and Moore and Podesva's (2009) work.

The analysis is a corpus based study, where British National Corpus (henceforth only mentioned as BNC) is the primary source of data. The analytical part opens with a study of sentence types that immediately precede both question tags. The empirical part will focus on the use of the question tags *right* and *isn't it* and the analysis of their pragmatic functions. Further, the analysis also studies whether the question tags are followed by a direct/indirect response from the addressee. Another part focuses in greater detail on the sociolinguistic aspects where especially the type of conversation (i.e. cross-gendered or same-sex conversation), speakers' age, speakers' gender and speakers' preferences towards a pragmatic function is discussed.

2 Language and Gender

The question whether men and women speak differently has been on people's minds forever, however, only recently the field of language and gender has started to be studied. Jennifer Coates admits (2004: 3) that this matter was addressed before. For example, newspapers provided the public with answers to questions such as "do men talk differently than women?" with answers that showed evidence of male speakers swearing more than women or women gossiping more than men. Coates (2004: 3) defines this type of "linguistics" as the so called "folk-linguistics", but she adds that although these statements created by the media are genuinely believed by the public, they might not be true.

Sociolinguists, though it represents a field which ought to study language and gender, has not been interested in it until quite recently. Coates (2004: 4) ponders about the reasons why the field only recently turned its attention to gender and concludes that the causes for it are threefold: dialectology's antecedent, linguistics' antecedent and lastly the position of women in society. Coates (2004: 4) asserts that up until 1980, dialectal studies have always focused on male speakers, preferably older and from rural environment as opposed to young speakers from an urban environment. Only after 1980 dialectal studies, such as that of Bate and Taylor's from 1988, included also female speakers and hence widened the area of studies.

By stating that the antecedent of linguistics, and therefore sociolinguistics, is responsible for sociolinguistics failing to analyze language and gender sooner, Coates (2004: 4-5) suggests that sociolinguistics commenced to distinguish itself from linguistics in that it has resolved to studying non-mainstream fields such as working-class groups, ethnic minorities, etc.

Many minority groups have undergone a thorough research, and the reason why women's language has been neglected is that women were never seen as a minority. Coates (2004: 5) states: "Linguistic variation coextensive with social class, ethnicity or age was what appeared salient to early sociolinguistics. So why wasn't gender perceived as salient? The answer is that, until relatively recently, men were automatically seen as the heart of society, with women being peripheral or even invisible." Coates further admits (2004: 5) that although this is hard to comprehend nowadays, when gender studies actually are a major source of income for businesses and for various researches, earlier, it was men who were in charge of all major and important political and other functions, and the major change which helped women to be perceived as equals to men was due to the Women's Movement that is responsible for Equal Pay Act and Sex Discriminations Act to go in effect in Britain in 1975. Afterwards, a major change occurred and both Coates (2004) and Eckhert (2003) acknowledge that the instigator of that change in sociolinguistics is Robin Lakoff.

Eckhert (2003: 1) acknowledges that it was only after 1972 when Robin Lakoff published her article “Language and Woman’s Place” when language and gender commenced to be studied excessively, as the article, which was later on expanded into an entire book, created a tremendous fuss. Although Lakoff has been excessively criticized for her article, publishing of the article represents the stepping stone for sociolinguistics concentrating on language and gender. While Lakoff has been criticized for the lack of empirical data (Coates, 2004: 5), Eckhert further adds (2003: 1) that her article was labelled as yet another product of a feminist paranoia, nevertheless, especially women were interested in what Lakoff had to say about the gender differences in language. Lakoff (1975: 5) herself admits already in the introduction that the data she bases the entire book *Language and Woman’s Place* on is largely taken from her introspective research, not for example corpus data or recordings of conversations.

2.1 Approaches to language and gender

Due to Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place*, linguists commenced to approach the issue of language and gender from different perspectives. Coates (2004: 5-6) outlines four basic perspectives which approach the matter:

1. Deficit Approach
2. Difference Approach
3. Dominance Approach
4. Dynamic or Social Constructionist Approach

Coates (2004: 6) argues that it cannot be stated that these approaches have developed one by one, chronologically, but rather that these approaches have been present all at once but always in tension between one another. Currently, the linguists have agreed on adopting the dynamic approach to language and gender. All of the four approaches do not have clear-cut boundaries, and the understanding of gender in each of them is somewhat different; more importantly, researchers can actually be inspired by more than one approach, they do not have to limit themselves to just one approach and can appeal to more (Coates, 2004: 7). The following sub-chapters are all based on Coates’ research as she provides short and to the point definitions and summaries of the linguistic approaches.

2.1.1 Deficit approach

Coates (2004: 6) introduces the deficit approach as one of the first ones to ever address the topic of language and gender. Deficit approach is often associated with Robin Lakoff’s book *Language and Woman’s Place*. Lakoff (1975) defines the basic features of women’s language,

which is abundant in linguistic devices such as hedging, excessive use of adjectives, exaggerated intonation, etc. Nevertheless, Lakoff actually admits herself that these linguistic features are usually perceived as weak, unassertive and generally powerless within a conversation. The reason why this approach is called “deficit approach” is due to Lakoff’s implicit assertion that women’s language is inherently weak and in order for them to be understood and seen as strong individuals they ought to learn how to speak more like men, who in contrast to women are perceived as assertive, strong and self-sufficient. The deficit approach is generally considered outdated by contemporary researchers, however, the general public (e.g. in working environment) focuses on various trainings that are attempting to learn ‘being assertive’; such trainings support the claim that the general public actually still does accept the deficit approach as it endeavors to learn women to be more like men.

2.1.2 Dominance approach

Dominance approach portrays women as being oppressed in a male dominated society, and every woman’s utterance is a contribution to male’s dominance and women’s subordination in a society (Coates, 2004: 6). Coates states herself that: “researchers using this model are concerned to show how male dominance is enacted through linguistic practice.” (ibid). This approach can be associated with West and Zimmerman’s article “Doing Gender” from 1987 because for them “doing power” is often associated with “doing gender”. They studied and analyzed how gender starts to disconnect from its purely biological definition of a term and slowly becomes associated with matters such as power, politics, economics, socio-economic status etc. (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Eckhert (2003: 2) associates this framework with Julia Penelope’s work *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Father’s Tongues* from 1990 or even an earlier work by Dale Spender from 1980 *Man Made Language*. She then also acknowledges that the dominance approach is also trying to keep women subordinated to men, an assertion stronger than that of Coates.

2.1.3 Difference Approach

Difference approach portrays men and women as different sub-cultures. Owing to women’s outrage for being treated as a subordinated group in society and their insistence that both males and female are two separate groups resulted in the difference approach which gained major attention from 1980s onwards (Coates, 2004: 6). Women in this approach state that the only reason why their voice has not been heard is that they were in a male dominated society, and that women do possess their own unique rhetoric with unique rhetoric strategies, unique

vocabulary, etc. Humm (1989: 51) notes that: “women have different voice, different psychology, and a different experience of love, work and the family from men.” Eckhert (2003: 1-2) further supports this notion by stating that the reason that stands behind men and women talking in various manners is due to the differences in their relation to language and their experiences early in life or various socialization patterns.

Contrary to the deficit and dominance approaches, this approach analyzes women’s language features outside the men’s framework and thus outside the notion of powerlessness in a conversation. Instead, the researchers focus on why these the distinct features of women’s talk ought to be celebrated. Nonetheless, even this approach did not avoid constructive criticism, its representative Deborah Tannen has been criticized for her book *You Just Don’t Understand* (1991), where she analyzes male-female misunderstandings in conversations. She obtained major critique for analyzing cross-gender communication when choosing to ignore the issue of power (that is present within the conversations). Difference and dominance approaches gained their largest popularity and acknowledgment in 1980s and 1990s, however nowadays the dynamic approach seems to be the prevalent one (Coates, 2004: 6-7).

Dominance and deficit approaches have been somewhat interconnected up until the late 1970s, when the differences between both approaches have become sufficiently distinct that Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramae and Nancy Henley urged other researchers to look beyond the difference-dominance dichotomy and to consider other factors that are present, such as context – who is talking to whom, whether people talk differently when at home or when at work, or when analyzing each gender what group of men and women are the researchers actually depicting (Eckhert, 2003: 3). Due to their urgency to shift the research from the rather basic dominance-difference dichotomy, the gender differences in language use is now studied in respect to what is the cause for diversity in speech among men and women. (Eckhert, 2003: 3)

2.1.4 Dynamic or social constructionist approach

Dynamic approach emphasizes the dynamic aspect that is associated with conversation. Researchers who adopt this approach do not limit themselves to only one approach, and perceive gender as a concept that is similar to a social construct rather than a given social category. Yet again, West and Zimmerman’s article (1987) is connected with this approach, as they also assert that speakers instead of being a statically a part of a given gender group, should actually be doing and portraying gender by themselves, showing what gender means to them. Gender thus represents a concept that is being accomplished and not given from birth (Coates, 2004: 6-7).

2.2 Gender differences in language use

Cameron et al. assert (1988: 74) that the linguistic interest in language and gender has gone two ways; first, it is primarily interested in the phonological and grammar aspects that are to be found within a variationist project (such as Trudgill's research from 1972 or Cheshire's research from 1982); or the second approach to the topic is from a more "holistic exploration" of interactions where especially politeness strategies, questions, directives etc. are analyzed. Lakoff's work, although criticized for the lack of empirical and objective evidence, is a major break-through in the second path of analyses concerned with language and gender. Cameron et al. (1988: 75) further acknowledge that Lakoff's work is almost always employed as the reference point for many researchers, and that especially shortly after *Language and Woman's Place* was published, many researchers actually commenced their studies with the so called "Lakoff's hypothesis" which actually stands for her albeit arbitrary division of women's language features. After an in-depth research was conducted, many of Lakoff's dwellings on women's speech features proved to be much more complex than she had anticipated.

2.2.1 Lakoff's perspective

Lakoff (1975: 7) is primarily concerned with linguistic discrimination that afflicts women in conversation; she claims that the discrimination against women in this respect is twofold:

1. In the way that women are taught to use the language
2. In the way that the general language use treats women

She believes that both these discriminations are putting women in a subordinate position, as if of a servant or of a sex object and she further suggests that certain lexical connotations therefore represent various, distinct things when talking about a woman and when about a man (Lakoff, 1975: 7). Lakoff (1975: 8-10) also believes that from the birth of a child, the child is exposed to "women's language" in the sense that the mother is the primary contact for the child and the child therefore learns women's language as its first language. As the child grows older, while boys are expected to go through a certain rough period in their lives, if a girl undergoes such a change in her puberty she is criticized for it as she does not behave as a lady should. By denying girls to express their opinions in a strong manner, Lakoff believes that women's identity is submerged. Instead, women are encouraged to "express triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it; and when a woman is being discussed, by treating her as an object – sexual or otherwise – [one never sees her as] but never a serious person with individual views." (Lakoff, 1975: 7). Ultimately, Lakoff (1975: 8) believes that women are denied an access to power because they are incapable of maintaining it within the conversation (due to their

linguistics behavior). What is ironic about this consequence is that women also believe that they deserve such treatment because of the lack of their intelligence or education.

2.2.2 Lakoff's differences in language use

When Lakoff (1975: 51) directly concentrates on the differences in language, she emphasizes that the most essential contrast between women's language and men's language is the politeness aspect of the speech. She mentions that women talk in a more polite manner and that it actually ought to be like this; she accentuates that women should evade slang, swear words and off color remarks. For Lakoff (1975: 51-52) women "are preservers of morality and civility, and we speak around women in an especially "polite" way in return, eschewing the coarseness of ruffian men's language."

Owing to such politeness strategies, women's talk is less direct in the sense that they do not impose their opinions, wishes etc. on others, which thus makes the hearer's decision more open and compels the hearer to think that his decision was made on their own without any external pressures; example of such a politeness strategy would be a tag question, as it does not force "agreement or believe on the addressee." (Lakoff, 1975: 17-18).

Lakoff (1975: 53-56) considers the following to be the quintessential features of women's language:

1. Women possess larger vocabulary than men (especially when talking of their interests and hobbies they exhibit much larger, colorful vocabulary).
2. Women tend to employ the so called empty adjectives much more than men (adjectives such as *divine*, *charming* and *cute* are prototypical examples).
3. Women, contrary to expectations, have different intonation in questions (especially tag questions) and declaratives.
4. Women utilize hedges more frequently than men.
5. Women employ intensifiers (such as *so*) much more than men.
6. When speaking, women avoid talking in a rough manner and tend to exhibit hypercorrect grammar.
7. Women resort to using super-polite forms when speaking.
8. Women do not tell jokes (Lakoff states that they ruin the punchline, they are generally less able to understand jokes and the border line is that essentially women have no sense of humor).
9. Women speak in italics, the more feminine and lady-like the woman is, the more italics are to be found in her speech.

Some of the points mentioned above deserve further attention. The usage of hedges exhibited by women is, according to Lakoff (1975: 53-54), an instance of them not being confident about the truthfulness of the facts they are presenting; she analyzes women's usage of hedges even further and states that the reason why women opt for hedges is because they mitigate the assertion that the women speakers are making, and thus when hedging in an utterance they seem more lady-like and feminine, as they believe that assertiveness and straightforward presentation of facts appears more masculine, rough and definitely not polite. Lakoff, nevertheless, is not the only linguist who acknowledges hedge use as one of the features of women's language. Jennifer Coates (2004: 88) does consider hedge use as a women's feature she however mentions that their usage is not as straightforward as Lakoff thought, and that there are essential factors that need to be contemplated, such as the function of hedges. Coates (2004: 88) further lists various studies conducted on the topic and demonstrates that although women do hedge more than men, both genders actually employ these linguistic devices for various purposes.

Lakoff states (1975: 55) that since women are viewed as the preservers of literacy and culture, they ought to avoid rough language, incorrect pronunciation (such as "h" dropping) and use hypercorrect grammar forms so that they can maintain their lady-like reputation. Lakoff illustrates the example of hypercorrect grammar with boys being less criticized for saying words like "ain't" and dropping the "g" in words such as "singin', goin', etc." in comparison to girls who experience harsh criticism when using these forms. Hypercorrect grammar also encompasses forms such as super-politeness. Lakoff (1975: 55) claims that while the super-polite forms are also connected to hypercorrect-grammar, the reason for employing super-polite forms is much deeper; when a woman refuses to appear polite in society, her position is more troubling and is often labelled as a social death in conventional circles in society. Hence, women are more than encouraged to use euphemisms, appear tactful and have the proper and polite responses because otherwise they are committing social suicide.

The last point mentioned in Lakoff's list of women's language features is the one concerning italics. According to Lakoff (1975: 55-56), women tend to use italics more because they want to truly emphasize what the reader/hearer should retrieve from the utterance or sentence. Lakoff compares the usage of italics to learners of English language and she claims that the more confident English speaker opts for italics use much less than the beginner who is not sure about the various aspects of English, such as grammar, syntax, morphology, etc.

Although Lakoff has been criticized by other linguists and her research has been labelled as insufficient in empirical data, it is interesting that the majority of linguists who are concerned with gender differences in language use still use Lakoff's research as the primary reference in

their own research. For instance, linguists such as Coates in her *Women, Men and Language* (2004:84 -90) lists various features that she considers as essential to women's language and in the majority of them, she is in agreement with Lakoff. Coates' women's language features include: hedges, minimal responses, formality of speech, that women talk more than men and questions.

2.3 Question tags

Allerton (2009: 308) defines question tags as “questions that are also tags, in the sense that they are tagged on at the end of an utterance. They can just as well be called question tags, because they are tags in the form of questions.” Both Allerton (2009: 308) and Quirk et al. (1985: 810) agree on the notion that tag questions are essentially a subcategory of questions. Allerton (2009: 308) points out that in comparison to standard questions (such as yes/no questions, wh-questions, etc.) the nature of tag questions is rather paramount in that they do not invite the hearer to answer the speaker's questions in full sentence's length but rather they seek the hearer's confirmation or agreement which can be achieved by a one word reply. Because of this definition, Allerton (2009: 308) describes tag questions as “question-like” sequences that are attached at the end of an utterance; be it a simple or a complex utterance. Due to the fact that tag questions are added after the main clause of the entire utterance, their nature in respect to whether they are to be considered as a separate sentence or only a potential sentence is often addressed. Allerton (2009: 308-309) suggests that tag questions ought to be looked upon as potential sentences which have been incorporated into another sentence. He then further adds (2009: 309) that the main sentence is to be called “base sentence”. Many grammarians have various terms for the “base sentence”; there is no generally accepted name for the phenomenon. Quirk et al. (1985) call it a “matrix clause”, Huddleston and Pullum use the term “anchor” (2002: 891), Biber et al. (1999) use “main clause” and Nässlin (1984) opts for the name “reference clause”.

Quirk et al. (1985: 810) assert that tag questions are actually a sub-type of a yes/no question, and that by adding a tag question after a sentence gives maximum or extra conduciveness to the statement as a whole. As a question category, they constitute a rather small one and are limited in their form (meaning that the form of a question tag is rather strict in comparison to other types of questions, such as yes/no questions or wh-questions).

Further, question tags are divided into two categories: **canonical** and **invariant** question tags, this terminology is agreed upon by all major linguists that address the topic of question tags, among them belong linguists such as Baker (2015), Tottie and Hoffman (2006 and 2009), Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Canonical tag questions

constitute of the previously mentioned “main clause” (matrix clause, reference clause, etc.) and the tag itself. They can further display various polarity which is either positive or negative and according to the polarity of the main clause, the polarity of the tag itself is or can be determined (Tottie and Hoffman, 2009: 130). Invariant tag questions are usually represented by one-word tags which are used in informal situations where the speakers are familiar with each other. Baker (2015: 315) also mentions that while the canonical tag questions gain most of the attention in ELT textbooks and syllabuses, the invariant tag question grow in their category and are employed in conversations more frequently than ever before.

2.3.1 Rules for forming question tags according to CGEL

Though all of the major grammarians such as Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) agree on what tag questions are, the best description of the rules which form question tags is to be found in Quirk et al. and therefore the following rules are largely taken from *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (henceforth only as CGEL).

According to Quirk et al. (1985: 310), there are five general rules to be followed when forming a question tag:¹

1. Tag question consists of an operator and a subject; the operator always stands before the subject.
2. The operator needs to be the same as the operator of the previous statement after which the question tag has been appended.

a. *I **haven't** seen you before, **have** I?*

If the previous sentence does not have any operator at all, the operator in the question tag is usually achieved by the verb **do**.

b. *She knows you, **doesn't** she?*

3. The subject of the tag must be in agreement with the subject of the sentence and must be in agreement in its number, gender and person.
4. If the statement which precedes the tag question is negative, the tag question is usually positive. This usually works vice versa, and it is considered unusual to deal with positive or negative aspects of both the statement and the tag questions.
5. The intonation of the tag question focuses on the auxiliary in the tag question and is always either rising or falling.

¹ Whenever an example is provided it is taken from Quirk et al., 1985: 810 – 811.

Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 283-284) follow up on the 3rd rule concerning subject agreement in the matrix clause and the tag itself. They (2006: 283-284) claim that the subject of the matrix clause can be either a personal pronoun, a noun phrase, or a pronoun “there”, but the subject of the tag itself needs to always be a personal pronoun, “there” or indefinite pronoun, “one”. From the verbal aspect, the matrix clause can contain any verb types (lexical, modal or auxiliary), but the tag part of the sentence always has to constitute from a modal or an auxiliary verb, lexical verb cannot occur in tag questions.

2.3.1.1 *Exceptions to rules for forming question tags*

Although the rules for forming tag questions are rather straightforward, there are instances when exceptions are possible. Quirk et al. (1985:811) and Biber et al. (1999: 208) both mention that sometimes the subject of a tag question does not necessarily have to be the same as the subject of the statement that precedes the tag question:

1. *He's a right little misery when he wakes up, **aren't you boy?*** (Biber et al., 1999: 208)

Biber et al. (1999: 208) explain that there is a shift of an addressee; whereas in the statement, the boy is spoken of in 3rd person and referred to as “he”, in the question tag the boy is directly addressed by the personal pronoun “you” and therefore the speaker quite conspicuously shifts from a third, unknown, addressee to the boy who is then directly addressed. Biber et al. (1999:208) mentions other shifts in addresses are also possible, especially the ones which include both the speaker and the addressee in the question tags:

2. *I'm not talking dirty, **are we?***
3. *You only had these two bags, **didn't we?***

The speaker in both of these instances decides to include even the addressee in the question tag, whereas the main clause is either addressed only to the addressee or to the speaker himself. Biber et al. (1999:208) further demonstrates that question tags are not only dependent on main clauses but can also be added to subordinate clauses such as in the following example:

4. *I don't think she'll be very pleased, **would she?***

Not only that the question tag follows a subordinate clause which is common once the main clauses expresses opinions or beliefs and follows verbs such as *think*, *believe*, or *doubt*, but there is also a shift in auxiliary from the neutral future reference *will* to the hypothetical *would* that appears in the question tag (Biber et al., 1999: 208).

Quirk et al. (1985: 812) also introduce an unusual type of tag question where both the main clause and the question tag are positive (as was mentioned earlier in section 1.3.1. the polarity

of the question tag and the main clause should be opposite). The following are instances found in Quirk et al. (1985: 812):

5. *Your car is outside, **is it?***
6. *You've had an accident, **have you?***

Quirk et al. (1985: 812-813) acknowledge that along the four basic types of question tags (viz. section 1.3.2.), this type ought to be counted as the fifth one, granted it represents an unusual category with distinct features. The positive + positive question tag is usually presented with a rising tone and the previous statement frequently includes words like *oh* and *so*. Therefore, once the speaker opts for a positive + positive type of a question tag, he is mostly repeating what has been said before or he comes to a conclusion by means of inference. This type of a question tag is also specific because the speaker can also employ a sarcastic tone as the following example suggests:

7. *So that's your little, game, **is it?***

By employing the sarcastic tone, Quirk et al. (1985: 812-813) distinguish between three basic functions of the positive + positive question tag:

- Scolding (e.g. *Oh, you've had another accident, **have you?***)
- Sarcastic (e.g. *So that's your game, **is it?***)
- Sarcastically contradictory (e.g. *So your car is inside, **is it?***)

Due to the fact that a positive + positive type of a question tag is to be found in actual use, one might anticipate a negative + negative question tag type as well, nonetheless, Quirk et al. (1985: 813) have never come across such a form in actual use.

2.3.2 Tag questions following other sentence types

Both Quirk et al. (1985: 813-814) and Biber et al. (1999: 210-211) agree that tag questions do not have to necessarily follow a declarative statement but can be actually added to other sentence types such as imperatives, exclamatives and interrogatives.

With imperatives, tag questions invite the listener's consent. Generally, the function of question tags when following an imperative is one of softening, meaning that the tag question lessens or softens the urgency or directness of the order towards the addressee. Quirk et al. (1985: 813) distinguish between negative and positive tags that follow the imperative – *won't* for the negative, and *will* for the positive. Whereas positive imperatives are quite commonly followed by a negative question tag, negative imperatives are not as commonly followed by a

positive tag question, the only question tag that can follow a negative imperative being *will you*, as is evident from the following example:

1. *Don't make any noise, **will you?***

The positive imperative can be followed by the following tag questions: *can't you*, *won't somebody*, *why don't you*, etc. as is demonstrated by the following examples taken from Quirk et al. (1985: 813):

2. *Open the door, **can't you?***
3. *Hand me a knife, **won't somebody?***
4. *Have another one, **why don't you?***

Quirk et al. (1985: 813) further admit that positive imperatives followed by a question tag can often exhibit a falling tone in intonation, however, such a tone is considered ill-mannered and should be avoided. Although these other tag questions are possible, they do not occur as frequently as *will you/won't you* which are the most utilized when the subject is in singular number. Biber et al. (1999: 210) further adds that *would you* represents yet another tag question that occurs with imperatives, however, it is not common as it is much less forceful than *will you*. With periphrastic infinitive the tag question is usually *shall we*: (Quirk et al., 1985: 813)

5. *Let's play another game, **shall we?***
6. *Let's not discuss it now, **shall we?***

Quirk et al. (1985: 813) state that when tag questions are added to exclamatives, it is because they invite the hearer's agreement with the speaker's utterance:

7. *How this she is, **isn't she?***
8. *What a beautiful painting it is, **isn't it?***

Question tags that are associated with exclamatives can also be added to verbless exclamative sentences as the following example suggests:

9. *What a beautiful painting, **isn't it?***
10. *How odd, **isn't it?***

Biber et al. (1999: 210), unlike Quirk et al., also mentions that tag questions can follow interrogative clauses and that such a use of a question tag is parallel to a declarative tag; it however also underlines the speech-act function of the main clause:

11. *Do you want this **do you**, anywhere?*

12. *Speaker A: Oh that Earnest film 's on tonight.*

Speaker B: Oh is it tonight, is it?

Speaker B: Yeah.

2.3.3 Invariant question tags

Quirk et al. (1985: 814) distinguish between other types of question tags that they call *invariant* because their form is always the same regardless of the form of the preceding statement (i.e. whether the declarative statement preceding the question tag is negative or positive). Furthermore, these invariant question tags only have a rising tone. The following instances illustrate invariant question tags:

1. *They forgot/didn't forget to attend the lecture, **am I right?** /is that so?/ don't you think?*

Biber et al. (1999: 210) also analyze alternatives to question tags that do not necessarily take the regular form of a question tag, are taken as such. Biber et al. (1999: 200) include into this category words like *right?*, *yeah?*, *eh?*, *ok?* and *don't you think?*. Nevertheless, they focus the most on a specific variant question tag: *innit* which is actually derived from a regular question tag *isn't it?* but is transformed into its colloquial form that occurs mainly in British English:

2. *Bit old, this program, **innit?***
3. *No one could speak French on that French trip, not even the teachers. That's so stupid, **innit?***

Biber et al. (1999: 1089), in connection to alternative question tags such as *eh?*, *huh?*, *alright?*, introduce the notion of response elicitors which are described as generalized question tags. The main difference between the regular question tags and these response elicitors is that they act more like discourse markers and they often have more of a speaker-centered role, meaning that once the speaker employs such a device, he/she is seeking a signal that will tell him that his message has been received and understood by the hearer. Biber et al. (1999: 1089) further add that usually these one-word response elicitors do not need an answer, the only exception being the response elicitor *right?*, which requires a verbal response:

4. *Speaker A: You know who Stan is, **right?***

Speaker B: I've heard his name.

The other response elicitors (demonstrated below), according to Biber et al. (1999: 1089), behave differently than *right?*, as they occur in more informal situations and would be

considered as rude if they were employed in a formal context. They can follow declarative sentences, questions or even directives:

5. *Oh hi, you're Brent's, you're Brent's older sister, **huh?** Your brother's so cool.*
6. *Might as well get rid of it, **eh?***
7. *I will leave her the message, **okay?***
8. *It's like a magnet obviously **see?***

2.3.4 Question tags and intonation

Intonation represents a key factor in tag questions as different intonation represents different pragmatic functions of a tag questions. Quirk et al. (1985: 811) mention that there are four basic types that emerge once one follows the intonation patterns in question tags – if we take a question “He likes his job, doesn’t he?”, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 811) there are four possible interpretations of this question, all depending on the intonation of each part of the utterance as a whole:

1. *He likes his job, doesn't he? – **Rising tone***
2. *He doesn't like his job, does he? – **Rising tone***
3. *He likes his job, doesn't he? – **Falling tone***
4. *He doesn't like his job, does he? – **Falling tone***

For the sake of clear arrangement, a table of various tag question types is provided below:

Polarity	Intonation
Positive main clause + negative tag question	Rising
Negative main clause + positive tag question	Rising
Positive main clause + negative tag question	Falling
Negative main clause + positive tag question	Falling
Positive main clause + positive tag question	Rising

Table 1: Overview of polarity and intonation of tag questions

As is evident from the four examples above, the key variance is the intonation which further distinguishes the meaning of utterances. Whereas the combination of a positive statement and a negative question tag with a rising tone creates the assumption that the “he” really does like his job, the combination of a negative statement, a positive question tag with a falling tone suggests that “he” hates his job. Essential for understanding the meaning of the question tags is to understand what they are constituting from and what each part of the utterance as a whole symbolizes. Quirk et al. (1985: 811) mention that tag questions represent a second part of the

entire utterance as a whole; the first part, i.e. the declarative sentence symbolizes the assumption which is expressed by the declarative statement or assertion of the speaker, whereas the second part, the tag question, is an expectation.

Baker (2015: 315) represents another linguist interested in the studies of question tags, and addresses the issue with the analysis of question tags. They are primarily a spoken phenomenon which makes it rather intricate to study them, as gathering enough material for a complex study is not an easy task. The most essential reason why spoken material is needed for the analysis of question tags is the intonation that plays a key factor in the pragmatic functions of question tags.

2.3.5 Pragmatic functions of question tags

Tag questions have represented an intriguing study area as they exhibit more than one pragmatic function. Holmes (1983) nonetheless, was the first linguist who has propounded an in-depth study of the various pragmatic functions that tag questions offer (although, Holmes herself perceives tag questions as hedges on the matrix clause). Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 298-299) acknowledge that the most major impact into the pragmatic functions of tag questions are made by Holmes (1995) and Algeo (1990), and though these two approaches are somewhat similar, they are often taken as the most thought-out.

2.3.5.1 Pragmatic functions according to Holmes

Holmes distinguishes between two major categories: epistemic modal and facilitative. Facilitative tag question then have three further sub-categories: facilitative, softening and challenging. (Holmes, 1995). For the sake of clarity, each category will be briefly introduced under the bullets below.²

- Epistemic modal
- Facilitative
 - a. Facilitative tags
 - b. Softening tags
 - c. Challenging tags

Epistemic tags express “genuine speaker uncertainty rather than politeness” (Holmes, 1995: 80) and have rising intonation as in the following example:

²All examples in this section are taken from Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 297-299).

1. *Fay Weldon's lecture is at eight, isn't it?*

Facilitative tags are: “examples of hedges which serve as positive politeness devices. They invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse.” (Holmes, 1995: 81).

2. Host to a guest at a dinner party: *You've got a new job Tom, haven't you?*

Softening tags on the other hand are used as negative politeness devices, their main function being to force attenuation of negatively affective utterances e.g. directives or even criticism (Holmes, 1995: 81).

3. *Make a cup of tea, would you?*

Challenging tags are confrontational strategies which “may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act.” (Holmes, 1995: 81).

4. Superintendent criticizing a detective constable's performance:

A: *Now you er fully understand that, don't you?*

B: *Yes, Sir, indeed, yeah.*

Moore and Podesva (2009: 452) appreciate Holmes' research especially because of her focus on pragmatic functions instead of solely focusing on which gender employs tag questions in conversation more. They conclude that Holmes proved that each gender actually prefers different pragmatic functions of tag questions; whereas men utilize epistemic modal and softening affective tags more, women actually favor facilitative softening tags to the other types. They further acknowledge that she also demonstrated that tag questions do not necessarily only signal a speaker's lack of confidence in conversation, but that they also strengthen interpersonal relationships as well as facilitate discourse (ibid).

2.3.5.2 *Pragmatic functions of tag questions according to Algeo*

The following is Algeo's classification, nonetheless, the examples provided with every tag definition are taken from Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 299 – 300).

- Informational
- Confirmatory
- Punctuational
- Peremptory
- Aggressive

Informational tags are used when the speaker already possesses some partial knowledge about something but when opting for this tag, he actually does not know what the addressee will say or how he/she will respond. In other words, these tags invite the addressee to respond while formulating an opinion of their own, as the speaker is not truly certain of the information he presents. Usually these tag questions have a rising intonation (Algeo, 1990: 445).

1. Q: *You don't have to wear any sort of glasses or anything, don't you?*

A: *Well, I wear glasses for reading sometimes.*

Confirmatory tags are in contrast to informational tags in the respect that the speaker is rather certain of the information he presents and by utilizing the question tag, he evokes agreement. According to Allerton (2009: 315), the speaker still “wants the addressee (perhaps reluctantly) to confirm this as an absolute certainty, i.e. to admit to knowing.” Confirmatory tags, unlike informational tags, usually occur with falling intonation.

2. *So we don't know whether they taste nice or not, do we?*

Punctuational tags are not used to seek confirmation of any information but are rather used for emphasis of what has been said as the speaker is certain of the truthfulness of the information he is stating. Punctuational tags are further interesting in that the certainty of what is being expressed is felt by both the speaker and the addressee (Allerton, 2009: 315). The problematic aspect of these tags is that no uniform opinion is made regarding the intonation that these tags are associated with. While Tottie and Hoffmann (2006: 299) mentioned that Algeo does not associate any intonation with these tags, Allerton (2009: 315) states that Algeo notes that falling intonation mainly occurs with these types of question tags.

3. *You classicists, you've probably not done Old English, have you? Of course you haven't.*

Peremptory tags follow a statement that has a universal or obvious truth value, disagreeing with such a statement is thus nearly impossible. These tags are often used when the speaker considers the topic at hand to be depleted and aims at ending the discussion; ultimately this tag has a secondary usage, as the addressee feels criticized for not knowing the universal truth and is often put down by the speaker to signal the addressee's ignorance. Peremptory tags have falling intonation (Allerton, 2009: 315 and Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006: 300).

4. *I wasn't born yesterday, was I?*

Aggressive tags are similar to peremptory tags, but the essential difference lies in them following a statement that is by no means a universal or obvious truth, and the addressee simply cannot know the information. However, the speaker treats the addressee as if he ought to know and thus comes across as provocative and insulting towards the addressee who in return feels at unease.

5. A: *Is that your brother?* (question addresses to a young man talking on a telephone)

B: *It's my dad, innit?*

2.3.5.3 *Algeo's and Holmes' pragmatic function comparison*

As Algeo (1988, 1990 and 2006) and Holmes (1983, 1984, 1986, 1995) represent the only two scholars who thoroughly analyzed pragmatic functions of tag questions, Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 297-299) mention that there are necessarily both similarities and differences in their approaches to the topic. While Holmes' work is based on spoken New Zealand English conversations (her recordings have approximately 60 000 words) and her main study's focus falls on politeness and gender, Algeo's work addresses the differences in the usage of question tags between American and British English. While Holmes provides her readers with statistics, Algeo does not, as his work is more of an eclectic manner.

Tottie and Hoffman (2006: 299), however, go further in their comparisons and state that Algeo's and Holmes' analyses are similar in the following respects:

- Algeo's informational tags are equivalent to Holmes' epistemic modal tags
- Algeo's peremptory and aggressive tags represent the challenging category with Holmes

What both Holmes (1995) and Algeo (2006) conclude is that question tags display a high degree of multi-functionality. Due to such multi-functionality, it is rather complex to classify tag questions and their pragmatic functions. Holmes (1983), Coates (1996) and Cameron et al. (1989) all agree on the notion that intonation accounts for a beneficial tool. How one can determine the pragmatic function, however, Holmes (1983) herself further adds that intonation is not always a clue and cannot always be distinct. Hence, relying on social context of the conversation comprises another useful tool for ascertaining the pragmatic functions.

2.4 **Tag questions and gender**

Lakoff (1975: 14-16) was the first one to analyze tag questions from a feministic perspective, stating that the usage of tag questions signal a lack of confidence in information that is being given to the hearer. For Lakoff (1975: 15): "a tag is midway between an outright statement and

a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter.”. In other words, Lakoff (1975: 16) also asserts that a tag question is a “declarative statement without the assumption that the statement is to be believed by the addressee: one has an out, as with a question. A tag gives the addressee a leeway, not forcing him to go along with the views of the speaker.”. Lakoff, goes on further to list the various situations where a tag might be used and what the tag in that particular instance means (such as making small talk, talking about feelings, etc.), while always emphasizing that women tend to employ tag questions in conversation more than men. She maintains (1975: 16-17) that the usage of tag questions is convenient for women because they can avoid committing to the consequences of the utterance once a tag question is added to the statement and therefore, ultimately, a conflict is being evaded. Nevertheless, she also states that this kind of behavior signals that the speaker is not certain of anything he/she is saying and is always looking for a confirmation from the hearer, which does not provide the speaker with much credibility.

Moore and Podesva (2009: 451) agree with Lakoff that tag questions are ideal for examining their micro-, meso-, and macro-social meanings because tag questions exhibit interesting functional and indexical behavior, i.e. that the usage of tag questions on the micro-level could signal a certain social type, whereas the usage on the macro-level might point to a statement that women tend to use tag questions more which then further marks them as subordinate within society. Unlike Lakoff, Moore and Podesva (2009: 452) acknowledge that stating that women tend to use tag questions as they are, in general, less certain of the truthfulness of their statements is problematic if context is not taken into account. Therefore, they admit that Lakoff’s focus on only one pragmatic function of tag questions ought to be considered as outdated or obsolete. Next, they mention (2009: 452-453) that none of the other researchers’ works had actually aimed at proving Lakoff’s hypothesis that the usage of tag questions subordinates women in society, but rather attempted to point out the various functions of tag questions, stating that both genders employ them equally but each gender prefers tags in various functions and in various contexts.

Coates (2004: 90-91) mentions a study conducted by Siegler and Siegler (1976), who gave students conversational samples and asked the students to guess the gender of the speakers; their experiment actually confirmed Lakoff’s hypothesis as the children were able to correctly infer speakers’ gender. According to Coates, however, their experiment does not prove Lakoff’s hypothesis but only proves that speakers have different attitudes in conversation; it actually does not affirm that women use tag questions more. Coates (2004: 91) admits that while a lot of studies confirm Lakoff’s hypothesis about a link between tag questions and women’s speech

or linguistics behavior (she names e.g. O’Barr and Atkins (1980) or Jones (1980) – studies that actually prove the exact opposite). Dubois and Crouch (1975) used a discussion session on a conference as their primary source of data, where they acquired 33 samples of tag questions (out of which 17 were canonical and 16 were invariant) and actually all of these were produced by men.

Coates (2004: 91-93) praises Holmes’ work from 1984 because she, as was mentioned previously, was the first linguist to analyze *various* pragmatic functions of question tags also mentioning that women’s and men’s usage does not differ greatly, as was generally believed before – for further reference see the table below:

Type of meaning	No. of tag questions	
	Female	Male
<i>Modal meaning</i>		
Expressing uncertainty	18 (35%)	24 (61%)
<i>Affective meaning</i>		
Facilitative	30 (59%)	10 (25%)
Softening	3 (6%)	5 (13%)
Total	51	39

Table 2: Gender distribution of tag questions according to Coates (2004)

Per the table shown above, it is evident that both genders actually prefer certain types of tag questions and although it is clear that women do actually opt for using tag questions more, the scale is not so clear cut as Lakoff stated. Holmes’ research (1984) is further helpful as she distinguishes between speakers who maintain the conversation – she uses the term facilitators for them – according to Holmes: “women are more likely than men to use tags when acting as facilitators.” (Coates, 2004: 92).

The last study that Coates mentions in connection to tag questions and gender is by Cameron, McAlinden and O’Leary (1989). Their study focuses on the usage of tag questions in symmetrical and asymmetrical discourse (by asymmetrical discourse they mean the type of discourse where the participants are not of equal status) – it shows that when participating in asymmetrical, the speakers never choose to employ facilitative tags. Coates (2004: 93) provides a table that summarizes Cameron et al.’s findings:

	Women		Men	
	Powerful	Powerless	Powerful	Powerless
<i>Modal</i>	3 (5%)	9 (15%)	10 (18%)	16 (29%)
<i>Affective</i>				
Facilitative	43 (70%)	0 –	25 (45%)	0 –
Softeners	6 (10%)	0 –	4 (7%)	0 –
Total		61		55

Table 3: Summary of Cameron et al.'s (1989) study

Cameron et al.'s findings actually disproves Lakoff's hypothesis as it shows that *powerful* speakers tend to use facilitative tags more.

3 Material and Methodology

The present paper is a corpus-based study, where corpus represents the primary source of material that is analyzed. Originally, it was intended to study the question tags *right* and *isn't it* mainly from the sociolinguistic perspective, however such research proved to be insufficient. Thus, it was decided to also study the question tags from the pragmatic perspective that is related to the sociolinguistic perspective in regards to the same-sex or cross-gendered communication as well as to the speakers' age and gender. 100 examples of the tag question *right* and 100 examples of the tag question *isn't it* were extracted from the British National Corpus (henceforth only mentioned as BNC). The main reasoning for choosing the BNC was that it is one of the largest corpora and its spoken materials exhibit greater variety in speakers in contrast to, for example, the Santa Barbara corpus which consists of approximately 10 recordings and of approximately 20 speakers. Although the Santa Barbara corpus was also contemplated as a possible source of material (especially due to the better quality of recordings, which allows the researcher to look for variations such as intonation), owing to the nature of the recordings and the small numbers of overall speakers, the BNC was opted for as the better choice.

The data was acquired by the following queries:

1. (_PUN*)is n't it
2. (_PUN*)right

Both queries were restricted to the spoken part of the BNC, however that was not the only restriction made. Oftentimes, the BNC provides samples with missing information about the speakers, for example the gender/age remains unknown and the sample thus becomes irrelevant. Due to this feature, further restrictions were made to the queries, as gender and age were chosen as relevant criteria for the analysis. Next, the query list was curtailed by the option *sort* which allows to put restrictions on words following the inserted query. Owing to the *sort function* the option *any punctuation* was chosen as it was necessary that both question tags are found at the end of utterances (which is necessary for formal aspects). Due to *sort function*, it was essential to go through each instance individually to determine whether the question tag listed is indeed a question tag and not, for example, a comment clause or the alike.

The reason why the queries are constructed this way is that it was imperative for this study to be dealing with prototypical tag questions which are divided from the main matrix clause by punctuation; that is why the (_PUN*) is put before the actual tag questions themselves. Further logic behind the query concerning the tag question *isn't it* is that the BNC

separates the base words from apostrophes, which is why the tag question had to be divided into three parts: *is*, *n't* and *it*. The case with *right* is not as complicated, for the word is inserted in its base form without any additional adjustments.

The listed results were put into random order so that greater variety of speakers, or sample conversations are acquired as the analysis benefits from it far more than from a small scale of conversations and speakers.

For clear arrangement, the analytical part of this dissertation focuses on the following categories:

1. Syntactic analysis of sentence types
2. Pragmatic functions
3. Question tags and direct/indirect responses
4. Speakers' gender

Each chapter approaches the topic with a prototypical example. Since context comprises the most crucial criterion for determining the pragmatic functions of question tags; it will be briefly introduced with each example so that the reader can determine and better comprehend the reasoning behind the assigned pragmatic function. It is impossible to correctly determine the pragmatic function without context.

Although the theoretical part introduced two major linguists, Holmes and Algeo, who studied the pragmatic functions of question tags, it needs to be pointed out that their distinction of pragmatic categories seems to overlap. Therefore, a modified typology has been used in the analytical part, which is predominantly based on Holmes (with Algeo's confirmatory category added). Further adjustments were made to Holmes' softening category (see the classification below). The following is the modified classification of pragmatic functions of tag questions:³

1. Epistemic modal
 - a. Uncertainty
 - b. Confirmatory
2. Facilitative
3. Softening
 - a. Directive
 - b. Criticism

³ The classification and its categories are further introduced on the following page, however examples that illustrate each pragmatic function are presented in the empirical part.

4. Challenging

Epistemic Modal function addresses the issue of the speaker being confident or not in the information they are presenting. Since the certainty can be twofold, the function is further divided into two subcategories, *epistemic uncertainty* and *epistemic confirmatory*. By employing the *epistemic modal uncertainty* function, the speaker expresses genuine uncertainty about the truthfulness of the information. They also want the addressee to respond and either to confirm or to refute the information. The *epistemic confirmatory* function, on the other hand, is employed only when the speaker is certain of the truthfulness of the presented information and wants the addressee to agree.

The *facilitative* function is the only pragmatic function that remains the same as when Holmes (1995) presented it with no further changes/additions. It is used when the speaker's main intention is to invite the addressee to further contribute to the conversation with a new piece of information or topic.

The *softening* function is used to attenuate the force of negatively affective utterances. As such, the *softening* function is further divided into two main subcategories: *softening directive* and *softening criticism* functions.

The *challenging* function is most commonly employed by the speaker as a confrontational strategy that forces the addressee to reply or to become aggressive and thus boost the negative speech act. Although it may seem that the *softening criticism* function and *challenging* function may overlap at times, the main difference lies in the fact that the *softening criticism* function can be used to criticize someone or something that is not directly involved in the conversation, whereas the *challenging* function is used directly to attack the addressee and to force him/her to engage in an argument.

Lastly, what needs to be pointed out before an in-depth analysis of each pragmatic function commences, is that where the question tag *isn't it* almost exclusively functioned as a question tag (meaning that the query inserted into corpus defined the criteria to such an extent that the *isn't it* form could not function as anything else besides a question tag), it was not the same case with question tag *right*. In many cases, the primary function of *right* was that of a comment clause or a filler. The examples below demonstrate such cases, where *right* could not be taken for a question tag.⁴

1. Right, great, okay, *right*?

⁴ Note that both examples are not to be found in appendix and they are added only for the reader's reference.

Ex 1 represents a back-channeling response to what had been previously stated. As such, the entire utterance does not have any meaning and only functions as a signal directed at the speaker that they have the addressee's attention.

4 Analysis

4.1 Syntactic analysis of sentences preceding question tags

As was already mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis (see section 2.3.3.), question tags do not necessarily have to follow only declarative sentences. In fact, they can follow all sentence types; declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives and exclamatives. Although, as Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) agree, question tags are preceded primarily by declarative sentences, they also admit that this is not a rule and that they can be preceded by all sentence types (although some not as frequently as others).

This thesis set out to explore this matter further; the following table shows which sentence types preceded the analyzed question tags. In certain cases, the sentence type could not be determined, as the utterance was only a fragment and it was next to impossible to determine the intended sentence type (discussed further in this chapter).

	Right	%	Isn't it	%
Declarative	73	76.1%	80	95.2%
Imperative	18	18.7%	2	2.4%
Interrogative	5	5.2%	2	2.4%
Exclamative	0	0%	0	0%
Total	96	100%	84	100%

Table 4: Sentence types preceding question tags

As is evident from Table 4, declarative sentence types clearly precede question tags most frequently. With the question tag *right*, declarative sentence type appeared in 76.1% cases, and with the question tag *isn't it* in 95.2%. These results confirm Quirk et al.'s (1985) and Biber et al.'s (1999) assertions that question tags are most commonly preceded by declarative sentences. Following examples further demonstrate the fact:

1. And he was set up to fight crime (pause) federal crime (pause) in America, *right?*
2. Yeah, cos anything bigger is gonna get knocked, *isn't it?*

Table 4 also shows that the question tag *right* bids greater variety of sentence types. Imperative sentence types occurred in 18,7% cases with the question tag *right* whereas with the question tag *isn't it* only in 2,4%. Perhaps, the reason for larger utilization of various sentence types is the more informal aspect of the question tag *right*, which provides the speakers with more freedom in the utterances.

3. Don't even bother stopping, *right?*

4. Ah, let him have a go, *isn't it?*

Interrogative sentence types occurred with both question tags rather rarely. Interrogatives preceded *right* only in 5,2% cases and *isn't it* only in 2,4% cases. The reason for such a rare usage of the interrogatives might be that question tags alone provide the sentences with question-like characteristics and can be considered redundant to have two question/or question-like features in one sentence.

5. Do you know the woman at the end of our road, *right?*

6. Or is it good afternoon now, *isn't it?*

Exclamatives did not appear in the excerpts from the BNC at all. It needs to be pointed out that the sample for this study is rather limited (only 200 examples) and no conclusions cannot be made, i.e. it cannot be stated with 100% certainty that exclamatives certainty do not precede question tags *right* and *isn't it*.

Fragmented utterances represent an interesting feature that arose during the analysis. Due to the spoken nature of the examples, in 20 occurrences (four with the question tag *right* and 16 with the question tag *isn't it*) it was impossible to determine the sentence type from the fragment. The following are examples of the fragments that preceded both question tags:

7. All the back, *right?*

8. Like a mini town, *isn't it?*

Although it is almost unfeasible to determine the sentence types, it is highly likely that the intended sentence types were declarative (as nothing even from the context of the conversations suggested that it was supposed to be either imperative or interrogative).

4.2 Pragmatic functions

As was already mentioned in section 3, the analytical part is going to be using a modified version of Holmes' classification of pragmatic functions. The primary pragmatic functions that will be covered are: *epistemic uncertainty*, *epistemic confirmatory*, *facilitative*, *softening directive*, *softening criticism* and *challenging* functions. Each of the categories is presented with a prototypical example. In the majority of cases, it was impossible to determine the pragmatic function just from the sentence provided in the BNC – usually sentences found in the BNC were only a few words long and did not make much sense on their own. Further context had to be searched for and analyzed in order to better understand the relationship between the participants and the topic at hand. After a brief introduction of each example's context, a reasoning behind the pragmatic function is offered.

Before immersing into the quintessential instances of pragmatic categories, a table is presented which summarizes the distribution of pragmatic functions associated with both question tags.

	Right	Isn't it
Epistemic uncertainty	31	31
Epistemic confirmatory	31	25
Facilitative	16	38
Softening directive	20	0
Softening criticism	0	3
Challenging	2	3
Total	100	100

Table 5: Distribution of pragmatic functions with both question tags

As was already mentioned in the theoretical part (see section 2.3.5.), Tottie and Hoffman (2006) agree that *epistemic modal* and *facilitative* functions are generally preferred by most speakers. Table 5 actually supports this assertion as well. *Epistemic modal* (both uncertainty and confirmatory) and *facilitative* functions represent the majority of occurrences found within the 100 examples with both question tags.

What can be further observed from Table 5 is that the question tag *right* actually invites a greater variety of pragmatic functions in contrast to the question tag *isn't it*. In the case of *isn't it*, 94% of instances belong either to *epistemic* or *facilitative* functions and the other two functions represent only a small fraction of the overall results. *Epistemic* and *facilitative* functions, though still representing the majority of cases with the question tag *right* (together they represent 78% in contrast to the question tag *isn't it* 94%). In contrast to *isn't it* the question tag *right* shows a decrease in the *facilitative* function. The *softening* pragmatic function, on the other hand, records an increase in usage to 20% which is in contrast with the question tag *isn't it* (the *softening* function acquired only 3%).

Perhaps, the reason for the diverse distribution of the question tag *right* can be that the question tag itself has to be substituted by another question tag so that the pragmatic function can be easily determined. To demonstrate with examples:

1. So, answer the question, *right?*
2. Load it, sort it out and print it, *right?*
3. Mm, the top lake is like very flat water, is a lot of weed and a lot of scum, *right?*
4. It's effectively eighteen thousand per annum saved, *right?*

5. Don't even bother stopping, *right*?

In exx 1 and 2, the question tag *right* can be replaced by *will you* and is therefore a prototypical case of a *softening* function, where the question tag's primary function is one of a softening mechanism that weakens the force of the matrix clause. If the question tag was not there, the sentence type of the entire utterance would change from a question-like sentence (as described in the theoretical part, specifically in section 2.3.1., by Allerton and Quirk et al.) to an imperative sentence with the primary function of a direct command.

Ex 3 is an instance of a *facilitative* pragmatic function. It is evident that the speaker already possesses at least a partial knowledge about the topic and actually shares the knowledge with the addressee as well. However, the speaker expresses to a certain extent their emotions about the lake and therefore invites the addressee to contribute to the discourse. The entire question tag can be paraphrased by either *isn't it*, *isn't there*.

Ex 4 is an example of *epistemic confirmatory* function. The speaker conducts a meeting and is not sure about the truthfulness of the information presented, and is verifying whether it is true or not. Again, this instance can be paraphrased by *isn't it*.

From context of ex 5, it is evident that the pragmatic function is *challenging*. Though the sentence does not necessarily need a paraphrase for better determination of the pragmatic function as it is rather clear. The question tag *right* can here be substituted by either *will you* or even a simple *okay* will do both demonstrate an annoyed tone of the speaker – especially in the context.

4.2.1 Epistemic modal function

As was mentioned in the material and methodology section, the *epistemic modal* function is subdivided into two other subcategories: *epistemic uncertainty* and *epistemic confirmatory* functions. Each category will always start with a prototypical example with the question tag *right* followed by an example associated with *isn't it*.

4.2.1.1 Epistemic uncertainty function

The *epistemic uncertainty* function appeared with both question tags (31 occurrences out of 100 examples with each question tag – see Table 5 for reference). The nature of the found examples is rather straightforward in the sense that determining the pragmatic functions was not as complicated as with the other pragmatic functions that are further discussed in the empirical part.

4.2.1.1.1 *Right*

Context is extremely relevant due to the pragmatic nature of the analysis. It is presented with every example that is discussed in the analytic part, as otherwise it would be extremely difficult to determine the pragmatic function just from the extract.

6. Friday (pause) so it's Wednesday and Friday, *right?*

Example 6 portrays a conversation between a father (John) and his son (Brian) while groceries shopping. They are suddenly interrupted by a cashier in the store who informs them about the opening hours of the store. Due to the abrupt change of their focus, both Brian and John are not certain what the cashier told them. Together they work out that the store is opened only twice a week, i.e. Wednesday and Friday. Ex 6 is uttered by John who is later on assured by Brian of the truthfulness of the information while also adding that he cannot make it to the store next week on Wednesday.

As is evident from the situational context, Brian (father) while possessing some partial knowledge (acquired immediately before thanks to the cashier), he wanted to assure himself and verify the truthfulness of the information without wanting to hear confirmation or without wanting to appear polite to anyone in his immediate surrounding. Thus, a decision was made that ex 6 is an example of an *epistemic uncertainty* function. Perhaps, the reason for Brian's genuine uncertainty is due to the sudden appearance of the cashier, who must have been listening to their conversation otherwise he would not be able to contribute to the conversation with information relevant to the chat.

7. Sorry, it's the other figure, the average age of our new recruits was under twenty one three years ago, *right?*

Ex 7 is one of the more easily determined *epistemic uncertainty* functions, especially in contrast with ex 6. It is taken from a work meeting between Mike, the group manager, Sheila, who is a team manager, and other members of the team. Mike is leading the presentation and comes across a point where he is not convinced about the truthfulness presented in the information and wants to verify it with others. Rather than for the purpose of being polite he opts for a question tag to make sure he will be presenting correct data in front of the client. The following examples demonstrate a similar situation as was in the ex 7:

8. But the only way you can get equity, *right?*
9. Er (pause) there's a small Escort (pause) mark three Escort, *right?*

10. Now, they thought it was only gonna be two because there's only two assessing people, *right?*

What all these instances (exx 7-10) have in common is the background – all these examples were found in a professional work environment where it is especially important to work with correct data. As was already mentioned in the theoretical part (see section 2.4.), Moore and Podesva (2009) and Coates (2004) claim that people who maintain the conversation tend to utilize tag questions more. This is especially true in examples 8-10, as the speaker in each of these instances facilitates the conversation and is therefore more likely to opt for a question tag when necessary and when appropriate.

4.2.1.1.2 Isn't it

11. For (pause) trombone, no, it's not, it's for, yes, it's for one of the trombones, *isn't it?*

Ex 11 depicts a conversation held between a music tutor, Gill, and her student Tom. The entire conversation concerns Tom who is asking various questions about brass instrument; how various tones are played differently on individual instruments. Tom asks his tutor a question about how much knowledge one needs to possess so that one could play more than one instrument, while Gill replies that no in depth knowledge is necessary but one needs to have a general overview.

Tom, in this particular instance, appears to already possess a partial knowledge about brass instruments; he is not seeking confirmation from his tutor as he knows that she is an expert on the area. He is therefore genuinely uncertain of the truth of the statement, exhibits genuine interest in the topic and wants to acquire some knowledge rather than to appear polite towards his tutor or to seek confirmation. If Tom was seeking confirmation from his tutor, he would need to rephrase the entire sentence in order to appear more certain of the information. At the same time, Tom's question does not require a lengthy reply that would suggest that he is inviting his tutor to contribute to the conversation with further information about what kind of clefs each instrument is using (or any other topic that might be associated with his question).

12. Calcium chloride, *isn't it?*

Ex 12 is yet another example that is found from the educational context – a conversation between a student, Andrew, and his tutor John where the tutor is testing his student's knowledge about the matter. Andrew is definitely not certain about the factuality of his reply and in his case (that is evident from the previous replies), he hopes that he is right (so the testing comes to an end).

Other examples of *epistemic modal* functions are the following:

13. And that's in Saint Mary's Road, *isn't it?*

14. Well, three or four weeks, I suppose, *isn't it?*

15. And this is in Soham itself, *isn't it?*

Whereas the work environment was associated rather frequently with the question tag *right*, it is not the case with the question tag *isn't it*. *Isn't it* seems to be associated with educational background and geographic locations. In the case of the educational background, the reason why speakers choose *isn't it* rather than *right* is most probably due to the hierarchy between the speakers. A student should not choose the question tag *right* which evokes an informal and a familiar tone towards his professor or a tutor. Whereas at work, it has become more and more popular to be on the first names basis with all employees within a company, and therefore the speakers are more likely to choose the more familiar form *right* rather than *isn't it* which is more formal.

4.2.1.2 *Epistemic confirmatory function*

The *epistemic confirmatory* function is not used in order to verify information in contrast to *epistemic uncertainty*. This pragmatic function is employed only when the speaker wants to hear a confirmation from the addressee. The speaker also does not seek any sort of contribution to the discourse. It could be argued that to some extent the *epistemic confirmatory* function might require only a back-channel response from the addressee.

4.2.1.2.1 *Right*

16. You go for a quick short-term fix, *right?*

The conversation above is among sales executives from the same company which seems to be struggling with their employees' salaries as they are not paid enough, and the company does not have the necessary income to pay its employees more. Stuart invites all other participants to contribute to the discourse with a possible solution to the situation. Brett suggests promoting people from within the company. Mike replies that he is not certain that their employees are ready for such a step, but eventually they all agree that there is no other way to fix this.

Stuart's usage of the *right* question tag is definitely one of an *epistemic confirmatory* function as it invites other speakers to contribute to the discourse with a solution to the situation. Although Brett does not opt for a question tag, his response triggers a new string of thoughts and later on they all Brett's solution to promote people within the company being the best one.

Therefore, it is evident that Stuart's usage of the question tag was *facilitative* and Brett's response brought the answer to the problem.

17. So that new Rover has been built so everything fits perfectly, *right?*

Ex 17 depicts a conversation between a father (Kevin) and his son (Paul). Kevin asks whether the new Rover he has bought for his son was built properly for everything to fit and nothing to rattle so that the Rover cannot operate properly. While Kevin asks this question, he seeks only a confirmation as it is evident that the manufacturer did not build this product and shipped it off to stores while it is still faulty. Kevin's question thus seems only a rhetorical one; he does not expect Paul to answer for it is obvious that the Rover will work properly. Due to Kevin's usage of the question tag, it was determined that the pragmatic function was *epistemic confirmatory*. It needs to be further pointed out that he did not allow enough space for Paul to reply, which, especially in this case, only emphasizes the rhetorical nature of the utterance.

18. So it's gonna piss it down any minute, *right?*

a. It's all BST.⁵

19. And I get up about (pause) half four, *right?*

It is not common for the *epistemic confirmatory* function to receive a reply only after the speaker continues on his/her own train of thoughts, however as was stated previously, the *epistemic confirmatory* function of the tag question is so strong that the addressee remembers it and responds after the speaker concludes.

Ex 18 is an instance of a conversation between two work colleagues where Wendy is clearly stating that it is about to rain (based on extra-textual clues). Although she could have stopped to let Derek reply, she continues with "It's not BST" which actually stands for British Summer Time. Afterwards, Derek jumps in the conversation and replies that April is the wettest month in York. Although ex 18 could be perceived as an instance on the verge of *epistemic* and *facilitative* functions, it was concluded that the example needs to be the *epistemic confirmatory function* due to the extra-textual clues, which strongly suggests that the nature of the entire conversation that the weather had to be bad when the conversation was recorded, and therefore Wendy could not be uncertain of the information.

Ex 19 is an instance of a conversation between two friends in their twenties, one being a bartender and the other being a postman. Leigh, the postman, commences a topic about when they have to get up for work and states that he needs to get up at 4:30AM to get to work. Albert,

⁵ BST stands for British Summer Time.

the bartender, replies that he gets home from work around 4:30 AM. Leigh's utterance invites Albert to contribute with what time he gets up in the morning or the other option (that he actually chose) was to reply by stating that around this time he gets home from work.

4.2.1.2.2 *Isn't it*

Another important feature of the *epistemic confirmatory* function is that it requires a direct confirmation from the addressee. The examples are provided with addressee's responses to further confirm such a fact.

20. It's rare for a woman, *isn't it?*

a. Rare... Yeah..

Two friends, Jessie and Harry, are talking about their mutual friend who just recently died of haemophilia⁶. As they are reminiscing about their friend, they eventually start talking about the disease. Jessie wonders whether the illness is a rare condition for females or not, while Harry supports her argument by saying that it is. Undeniably, Harry's agreement shows that Jessie's usage of the question tag is an instance of an *epistemic confirmatory* function.

21. Yes, but caramelly burned, *isn't it?* Quality burned.

a. Sure.

b. Do you think Christine and Colin would enjoy a meal here?

Ex 21 is taken from a conversation between a married couple, Chris and Norrine, who are currently cooking a meal. Chris is the cook and asks Norrine whether she can smell the slightly burned caramel in the dish or not. Even though he does not give her space to answer the question, as he adds that the caramel is burned in a quality manner, she still manages to reply (see 21a.). The reason why Norrine, although not directly, replies is that Chris utters the sentence in a way which pushes the addressee to reply and to confirm it. Although, it could be argued that Norrine could have said that the caramel is burned in a bad way or that she cannot smell anything (therefore it could be pointed out that the pragmatic function might have been *epistemic uncertainty*), her agreement with Chris shifts the pragmatic function to a confirmatory one.

22. Lovely. Yes lovely. Very good. Now that's pretty well perfect, *isn't it?*

a. Smashing yes. That's good. Yes. Yes.

b. You can still cut back over to the to about there.

⁶ Haemophilia is a serious inherited bleeding disorder.

Ex 22 depicts a conversation between two friends, Chris and David, who are playing croquet together. David seems to be better at it than Chris, as he is showing him how to play, how to improve his position to make a better shot, etc. Chris, after following his instructions and making a shot, confirms that his advice is much appreciated for it perfected his skills in croquet. David's usage of the question tag and Chris' reply emphasize that the function is *epistemic confirmatory*, which might even be due to extra-textual cues as they both actually witness how much better Chris' shot was, whereas the reader cannot see that.

23. Otherwise it's all slimy, *isn't it?*

- a. That's right. Yeah.
- b. Well you should have told me!

Ex 23 is yet another instance of a conversation excerpt taken from a home environment concerning cooking. Mark and Sue are discussing whether people are supposed to put hot water over rice or not. As is evident from Sue's answer, she agrees with Mark's question and tells him that he was supposed to pour hot water into the pot, however, from the next sentence it is clear that she forgot to tell him and as a result the rice went slimy, as Mark mentions in the first part of the excerpt. Potentially, the example can be perceived either as *epistemic uncertainty* or *epistemic confirmatory* functions but as Sue agrees with Mark, it was determined that the pragmatic function was *epistemic confirmatory*, due to the fact that Mark already knows that he was supposed to put hot water over the rice due to extra textual cues (e.g. that the rice is already slimy). Perhaps, the reason why he actually utters the sentence is to make Sue feel bad that she did not tell him before and the rice is now spoiled.

4.2.2 Facilitative function

The *facilitative function* is, unlike *epistemic modal*, according to the modified classification in this paper and also, according to Holmes (1995), it is used to invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse information relevant to the discussion – whereas the *epistemic modal* function is used to verify information, as the speaker is not certain of its truthfulness. However, prototypical examples that Holmes employed in her paper did not appear in the 100 examples (on each tag question) in the BNC. The examples that are analyzed in the following subsection were at times difficult to analyze, as the addressees were not provided with enough space to respond and contribute to the discourse. Such instances were not listed in Holmes' work.

4.2.2.1 *Right*

24. Two pound eighty five, it says, for bacon, sausage, egg, fried bread and tomatoes which, anywhere, that's reasonable, *right?*

a. You get half a slice.

Ex 24 is taken from a conversation between two friends discussing restaurant prices. Kathleen, the speaker, asks her friend, Maggie, what she thinks about the deal for which she can buy her favorite dish. While Kathleen already possesses knowledge about the topic and actually knows how much the meal will cost her, she invites Maggie to articulate her opinion about the price, whether the restaurant is overpriced or not. Maggie responds that for such a price Kathleen will get only half a slice of her favorite dish, while somewhere else she would get more. Due to Maggie's response, it is evident that Kathleen's usage of a question tag is *facilitative*, as she does not want to verify the truthfulness of her information, but rather invites Maggie to contribute to the discussion with a new perspective that is her own opinion and perhaps sway her to change restaurants.

25. Is something that I would not say to a French lady, something that I could say to my daughter, *right?*

b. No, you can say that your French is not so good and only then you can say it to your daughter. (laughter)

This conversation is held between Joelle, who is a French native speaker and works as an au-pair, and Adam, the speaker, who is trying to learn a few easy French phrases. Adam is asking Joelle to correct him. Ex 25 was rather difficult to determine, as at first it might seem as *epistemic confirmatory* or even *epistemic uncertainty* functions, but after further investigation into the overall nature of the conversation, it was determined that Adam's main motivation was to learn more information and he indeed wanted Joelle to provide him with more information rather than either to verify his uncertainty or to confirm what he stated.

26. And you know Easter after two weeks, *right?*

c. What? Already in two weeks? I had no idea, the date always changes!

Two high school students, Josie and Truno, are having a discussion about various school-related topics when Josie suddenly changes the topic to Easter and how quickly it is approaching. Truno is actually surprised that Easter is already in two weeks and his reasoning why he did not know is that the date always changes and that is why he is unable to remember when Easter is.

Ex 26 again is not as straightforward as ex 24. It could be argued that Josie wants to hear confirmation from Truno, which might have been the case, but due to Truno's reply it was decided that she actually invites him to contribute to the topic rather than confirm her being correct. The main motivation for the *facilitative* function is that they both momentarily start talking about their Easter plans and how they are looking forward to having time off school rather than confirming the dates on which that year's Easter falls on.

27. So, if I take this bearing, this is a g—very common question they have in GCSE, take a bearing from J and it's forty five degrees, **right?** Now that is the reverse bearing, the back bearing.

d. And that'll be right on, right on.

John (a tutor) is teaching Sara (student) mathematics to prepare her for her GSCE exam. While it could be argued that his usage of the question tag is a rather specific one as he does not provide space for Sara to reply, it needs to be pointed out that Sara actually understands his usage of the question tag *right* as an invitation to further comment on the topic and that is why she replies in the way she does. She could have simply nod her head or resort to a back-channel response *yeah* or *mhm* but she actually feels the need to further comment on and contribute to the topic – as such these are the main *facilitative* function features.

Although John probably has not intended the pragmatic function to be *facilitative* but rather *epistemic confirmatory*, both participants play an important role within the conversation and although she might have misunderstood him, she actually contributed to the discourse with relevant information.

4.2.2.2 *Isn't it*

Ex 28 (see below) portrays a conversation between a retired couple (Clarence and Nina), however, Nina still works one-off jobs to increase her pension. It is evident that Clarence wants Nina to respond to his question while formulating her own thoughts and opinion concerning the job. He does not want her to mindlessly confirm that the job she is doing is worthwhile.

28. It's a worthwhile job though, isn't it?

e. Oh well yes—we need to do it.. and there's one job.. I'm not looking forward to it.

29. Good walk up there you know, **isn't it?**

a. Well it's only about as far up there as it is up to town.

b. Is it?

A couple is debating how they will get to a party up town, whether they will walk, drive or get a taxi. Ann asks this question by which she invites her boyfriend Stuart to contribute and actually express his opinion about the means of transportation. She actually needs his opinion at this point as she is reluctant to make the decision herself. What is interesting about this *facilitative* function is that although it is *facilitative*, Stuart's answer offers annoyance towards Ann (see 29.a and 29.b). Later on, they both agree to walk there, however what precedes the joint decision is a representation of a somewhat passive aggressive discourse exchange between them. Throughout the entire conversation, Stuart did not choose a question tag once, while Ann is the speaker who tries to keep the conversation going by utilizing quite a lot of question tags throughout the entire conversation.

30. It's just as nutritious though, *isn't it?*

Ex 30 portrays a family conversation between parents and their daughter about the benefits of brown bread. Margaret, the speaker, is contemplating whether brown bread is just as nutritious as white bread or not. By wondering about such topic out loud she invites her husband, Raymond, to step in and provide her with facts which make the brown bread as nutritious as white one despite the smaller packaging.

31. Yes yes and it's fresh air gentle exercise, isn't it?

Ex 31 depicts a conversation held between two neighbors Chris and David who are talking about a certain stranger, Evelyn, who passed them by, commenced a chat about croquet and later on disappeared. Chris and David are wondering what is so beneficial about croquet and agree that it is good due to the fact that at least the person does go outside and, especially for retired people like Evelyn, it represents a nice and gentle exercise. Although Chris is the speaker, David further contributes to the discourse by naming one other benefit; meeting new people.

4.2.3 Softening function

As was already mentioned in sections 2.3.5. and 3, the *softening* function is usually used to attenuate the force of the utterance, especially in sentences that have negative connotation, e.g. criticism or even directives. Due to the twofold nature of the attenuation, the category was further divided into two subcategories, i.e. directive and criticism. The *softening* function with the question tag *isn't it* significantly decreases in the usage, as was shown in Table 5 (employed in only 3%). Perhaps, the reason for the decrease in the function is that the softening function might be associated more often with the prototypical question tags such as *would you*, *will you*,

or the speaker might not opt for any question tag and instead choose the courtesy subjunct *please* when formulating a directive.

Another interesting result is that the *softening directive* function only appeared in connection to the question tag *right*, whereas the *softening criticism* function appeared only with the question tag *isn't it*.

4.2.3.1 *Softening directive function*

4.2.3.1.1 *Right*

32. Go up and borrow Matt's, get your dressing gown on and make yourself some toast, *right?*

Ex 32 is an instance taken from a family conversation between parents, Jane and Matt, and children, Laurie and Christopher. Jane, the mother, tells Laurie to borrow her father's slippers as she cannot find her own. It is clear that the question tag *right* has the *softening directive* function as the entire matrix clause is a directive and the question tag only lowers the force of the directive. Almost exclusively, the *softening directive* function appeared in an intimate environment, i.e. within a family circle. It may be that the question tag *right*, as was mentioned previously, is less used less frequently in informal contexts, as well as contexts where the participants already know each other well. Therefore, it may be that *right* appears less in formal contexts, for example at work:

33. Load it, sort it out and print it, *right?*
34. Hand it in now love, *right?*
35. Put them on a plate, *right?*
36. And don't forget all the tins go in that box, *right?*

Ex 33 is rather specific in contrast to the other examples of the *softening* function, as it is from a work environment where the main speaker, Keith, a telecommunication engineer, gives instructions to someone over the phone. What is further specific about this example is that the addressee's responses are not provided due to the conversation being over the phone. It is evident that the addressee somehow responds to Keith's directives, as he replies *mhm* and *yeah* and it can thus be inferred that the directive was processed and Keith is already commenting on the progress of the situation. The question tag thus represents a softening role in the utterance. As was stated in the paragraph above, *right* is usually associated more frequently with less formal situations where speakers already are familiar with each other. However, this is not the case here; the reason why Keith decided to choose *right* instead of a more formal question tag

might be that he does not see the addressee, he/she is an abstract person for him and he therefore might not have the urge to appear so formal.

4.2.3.2 *Softening criticism function*

4.2.3.2.1 *Isn't it*

37. That's what's wrong with it though, *isn't it?*

38. It is your second, *isn't it?*

Ex 37 depicts a conversation between in-laws, specifically between a mother-in-law and between her son-in-law having a discussion about poll tax and about how much is the son-in-law, Arthur paying for it. The discussion evolves around how the locals in one district pay a larger poll tax than residents in another district and how unjust the system is. This particular instance of the *softening* function of *isn't it* is not one of directive which was seen in the previous section, but one of criticism towards the system and not a particular person. As described by Holmes (1995) and Algeo (2006), the question tag serves as a force that attempts at minimizing the critical impact on the system. This feature will probably be utilized more when criticizing a person and not a state poll tax, as the person actually can take the criticism and react to it in certain way.

Ex 38 is a conversation between a mother and her two daughters about how many teaspoons of sugar they are allowed to put in their tea. Clare demands another teaspoon while her mother judgmentally responds that she cannot have it, as it is her second one. Though the criticism in the utterance is not as strong as it is in ex 37, it is obvious that her mother is not pleased with her demand and will not allow it to happen.

The main difference between lies in the fact that ex 37 criticizes a system whereas ex 38 lambasts a small girl. The responses to the utterances are completely different; whereas in ex 37 Arthur's mother agrees with how the system is not well thought-out, in ex 38 Clare responds by lying and states that she barely had any sugar in the tea and attempts to deflect and hide the truth in order to get what she wants.

4.2.4 **Challenging function**

The *challenging* function is used as a confrontational strategy which forces the addressee to reply aggressively or to boost the negative speech act.

4.2.4.1 *Right*

An interesting feature with the *challenging* function is that it occurs with imperatives, which may result in confusion between the *challenging* and *softening direction* functions. Context resolves this potential difficulty (especially in the following examples).

39. Don't even bother stopping, *right?*

a. What?! Just give me it.

Ex 39 delineates a conversation between two teenage friends, Josie and Cassie, where Cassie is irritated with Josie because of a letter she found. Although the content of the letter remains unknown, Cassie is obviously annoyed by Josie, who takes the entire situation lightly and commands her to read the letter first, and when she only laughs and does nothing, she screams at her to read it and not to stop reading the letter before she is finished. Ex 39 is one of the few instances where even without context, it can be deduced that this is a typical example of a *challenging* function, as the main clause is a directive and the irritation can be sensed from just reading the sentence. As was stated, the challenging function forces the addressee to reply (but only reluctantly) as is seen above. Josie obviously does not want to get into the detail of the letter but knows there is no escaping Cassie and finally gives in and reads the letter.

40. Well I cleaned all the windows Gordon, *right?*

41. Just totally forget, it's there, *right?*

Both examples above demonstrate the speakers' irritation with conversation participants. Ex 40 and 41 are different in comparison to ex 39, as they depict irritation that is caused due to the addressees' actions (or lack of) whereas Cassie, the speaker in example 39, is annoyed by the content of a letter she received and actually takes it out on her friend.

Let us look at the ex 41, which actually depicts the beginning of a situation where people are being recorded by a member of the BNC, Jim, who is irritated because the person being recorded is unable to ignore the microphone and does not behave naturally. Jim had to repeat and ask the participant (name unknown) several times to ignore the microphone but was always interrupted by the participant with questions such as what the recording is supposed to be about, etc. Only after the last sentence, he finally forces the participant to agree and changes the subject and to start a new conversation.

4.2.4.2 *Isn't it*

Ex 42 (see below) depicts a conversation between Peter and his employee about their meeting in Birmingham with their client. Peter is actually annoyed by the client's incapability

to schedule a meeting and arrive on time. His coworker (whose name remains unknown) feels the same and points out that the client will not be able to make the meeting and pushes Peter over the edge; Peter afterwards lashes out (see 42a).

42. And, if you're right, it's pressure all the time, *isn't it?*

a. We ain't got time to think about it, I haven't got time for all that.

43. That's the way of putting it, *isn't it?*

a. Well.. no it isn't, no, no

b. You can't close your eyes and say, it isn't there, if I don't look it'll go away.

44. Well, it may not be helpful, but it is the reality, *isn't it?*

Ex 42 exhibits peculiar aspects because both speakers show annoyance towards a third person, who is not present in the conversation at all. Usually, the *challenging* function depicts negative feelings towards a person who is directly involved in the conversation. In this instance, the client is not present and both speakers are talking about him behind his back. Although the primary cause for their anger is the client's behavior, it seems that they cannot address it directly in the presence of the client. Therefore, they both cannot expect the client to defend himself and can only continue to rant on and eventually calming.

Ex 43 is a prototypical instance of a *challenging* function as the entire conversation is an argument between a TV presenter John and a waiter (name unspecified) about the British political parties. Whereas John is presenting valid points throughout the entire conversation and actually has the upper hand, the waiter is unable to fight back. Surely, it can be deduced that the waiter (PS3CW) is lacking valid arguments, and John has no trouble challenging him in the entire conversation.

4.3 Question tags and direct/indirect addressee responses

Throughout analysis of pragmatic functions, an interesting observation emerged, i.e. that the question tag does not always receive a direct reply from the addressee, meaning that the speaker does not allow the addressee to reply to their question and continues speaking. To look in greater detail to see how many times the speaker actually gave space to the addressee to respond in contrast to how many times they did not, would be interesting. This analysis is especially intriguing when analyzing the *facilitative* function which relies on the addressee's response. Table 6 (see below) illustrates the distribution of responses associated with the question tags.

	Direct response	Indirect response
Isn't it	68	32
Right	63	37
Total	100	100

Table 6: Direct and indirect responses' distribution with question tags

It is clear from Table 6 that both question tags prefer a direct response from the addressee. Results like this one are expected, as question tags are by definition question-like sentences (as was mentioned in section 2.3.), they require by default an answer from the addressee. Even though, with the question tag *isn't it* 32% and with the question tag *right* 37%, a direct reply was not the case. In all of these cases, the addressee actually commented on the content of the question tag after he/she was provided with space to do so.

The reasoning for not providing the addressee with enough space was that the information load to which the addressee responds, and therefore the answers, is much longer than a simple confirmation, information specification, etc.

However, as was mentioned above, different pragmatic functions have different needs and so once the pragmatic functions are analyzed in greater depth, it is evident that not every question tag exhibits a clear-cut difference as some pragmatic functions actually do not require a direct response. For the sake of space, an immediate addressee's response is from now on be mentioned only as IR (immediate response) and postponed response will only be mentioned as PR (postponed response).

	Epistemic Uncertainty	Epistemic Confirmatory	Facilitative	Softening Directive	Softening Criticism	Challenging	Total
IR Isn't it	22	21	23	0	2	<i>1</i>	100
PR Isn't it	9	4	15	0	1	2	
IR Right	22	21	5	15	0	1	100
PR Right	9	10	<i>11</i>	5	0	1	

Table 7: Direct and Indirect distribution among pragmatic functions

As is evident from Table 7, only two pragmatic functions (in italics, i.e. challenging IR with the question tag *isn't it* and PR response with the *facilitative* pragmatic function associated with the question tag *right*) shows PR as the more prevalent as the IR response.

Especially interesting is the result concerning the *facilitative* function where the PR response was found more often than the IR response. Due to the nature of the *facilitative* function, i.e. that it actually requires the addressee to contribute to the discourse and further

maintain the conversation, it is surprising that the result was one of PR response. Let us look at some of the examples that were found with PR responses with *facilitative* function:

45. So week one might be a slide lecture (pause) on the three themes (pause) plus, erm a show and demonstration of board games, *right*? So I happened to have got some (pause) slides of tattoos and (pause) some slides of fairground (pause) er, art and erm (pause) some slides of board games (pause) of through the ages, and there's some real ones.
46. And he was set up to fight crime (pause) federal crime (pause) in America, *right*? So let's work out where the federal crime comes in. At the bottom there's America and American is divided up into states, the states of America, *right*? And within the states, each state, there are towns (pause) areas, whatever and.
- a. Villages. So are these villages divided into small police forces?

Ex 46 is rather specific, as the speaker continues to talk without giving any space to the addressee to reply, to present an idea or to a question. Due to the density of the information in the utterance, it is obvious that the addressee actually has a follow up question that concerns the geographical division of states rather than commenting on the fact that J Edgar Hoover was supposed to fight the crime in the US. The addressee seems to cut off the speaker in the middle of their sentence and fills in the information that seems the last relevant with a follow up question. In a way, the addressee felt and understood the facilitative function of the question tag (and actually question tags, as the speakers uses it multiple times in the excerpt) and felt the need to respond. Thus, the pragmatic *facilitative* function was understood and realized by the addressee who could not ignore their right to contribute to the discussion.

47. And, if you're right, it's pressure all the time, *isn't it*? We ain't got time to think about it, I haven't got time for all that. I've got a classic on the TV in a few, in perhaps a hour's time. I haven't got time to plan it, I'd better get on with it.
- a. Sometimes you're called in that many times in the, I mean, they put the phone down y-- , on you, do you know what I mean, and it's actually getting to speak to the person is just a (pause) total shock.
48. It is keeping it off though, *isn't it*? Once you. Yeah. Once you're erm (pause) got it off you've gotta keep it off. That is the art in doing it.
- a. No, keeping it off isn't enough.
- b. Hmm, you are probably right.

Ex 47 is an instance of a *challenging* function without a direct addressee's response. Similarly, with *facilitative* pragmatic function, the *challenging* function puts pressure on the addressee to respond to the speaker's critique towards the hearer. In this instance, the speaker does not give any space to the addressee and continues ranting on about the pressure. Interestingly, the speaker actually is not directly angry at the addressee, but at their supervisors. The speakers do not have an argument with each other but rather rail against their supervisors together. Despite this quite odd feature, the pragmatic function of the question tag is one of a *challenging* function and perhaps it is also why the speaker does not allow the addressee to respond, as the rage is not directed at him but rather at a third party.

Ex 48 delineates a conversation between a married couple where Joy tells her husband that she has managed to lose weight and actually stopped going to Weightwatchers⁷. She then adds that the hardest part about losing weight is keeping off of the *junk-food* and keeping the desired weight. Joy does not allow her husband to reply, as she desired to emphasize the struggle people like her feel when losing weight (i.e. that the true art is staying away from unhealthy food). However, her husband does not agree with her and states that eating healthy is not enough, and that people need to keep exercising as well. Despite the fact that he was not given space to reply, he knew that he was invited to provide his own opinion on the matter and actually convinced his wife that she needs to exercise as well along with eating healthy. Maybe Joy didn't want her husband to reply directly because she actually did not want to hear what he wanted to say, as she knew he would not agree with her.

Another interesting case when the speaker is not given a direct response comes to mind when thinking of the *epistemic uncertainty* function, which requires verification of the truthfulness of the presented information.

49. Apart from his chest he's (pause) the only bit of white on him, *isn't it?* Oh no just a little bit of feet on.
 - a. No, that under (pause) on his paws.
 - b. Yeah, I forgot.
50. But his car's over there, *right?* Leigh? It's over there? If you put (pause) (unclear) there. You've only got (unclear).
 - a. Oh, sure! It's there.

⁷ Weightwatchers is an American company which focuses on coaching people how to lose weight either through exercising or through healthy diet.

Ex 49 depicts a conversation held between a mother and her daughter about a cat that belongs to someone in the neighborhood. Tony (daughter) asks her mother a question whether the cat is only white on his chest. Although it is evident that she is not sure that the cat is only white on its chest, she does not give her mother space to answer the question and continues wondering aloud about all of the other spots on the cat which might be white. Her mother, although later, replies and corrects Tony's assumption that the cat is only white on its chest and not somewhere else as well.

Her mother felt the uncertainty that was present in her daughter's tone and her question. Despite the fact that she was not provided space to reply on time, she managed to find the right opportunity to correct her daughter and tell her the truth.

Ex 50 portrays a conversation between teenage friends, Mark and Leigh, about their other mutual friend Albert, who is apparently uncontrollable, rebellious and a trouble maker. Mark is wondering where Albert's car is. He is not certain of the exact location and checks with Leigh who seems to be more informed about the matter. Mark's choice of words, as well as the lack of space to answer his question and the demanding tone of his question suggests Mark's uneasiness, which does not allow space for any replies. Leigh eventually finds a way how to reply and reassure Mark that Albert's car is exactly where he pointed out in the first place. This example relies on extra-textual cues which are demonstrated in the locative usage of the pronoun *there*.

4.4 Speakers' gender

As was already mentioned in the theoretical part (sections 2.2., 2.3.6. and 2.4.), gender has been frequently studied in association with question tags. Although there was never any unified opinion about the matter, recent studies (especially Moore and Podesva, 2009) show that women tend to employ question tags with *facilitative* function more often, whereas men tend to employ *epistemic modal* and *softening* pragmatic functions.

Before studying this matter in further detail, the background of the conversation also needs to be considered, meaning whether the conversation is cross-gendered (both male and female participants are present) or same-sex (either male or female participants). Marche and Peterson's study (1993) shows that gender-oriented papers are often limited in the sense that they do not consider context as a relevant variable, i.e. that each speaker (male/female) communicates differently with a speaker of the other gender. Their research actually shows that when men are addressing women, they tend to employ features such as back-channeling responses, question tags as well as other linguistics devices more often than when talking to men. This argument is supported by Bilous and Krauss' study (Bilous and Kraus in Marche and

Peterson, 1993: 799-800) which looked at back-channeling behavior. It shows that both male/female speakers are actually more responsive when talking to the opposite sex. The following provides a quantitative analysis of the use of question tags with respect to the following categories:

1. Type of conversation
2. Speaker's age
3. Speaker's gender
4. Gender and pragmatic functions

4.4.1 Type of conversation

The following table summarizes the types of conversations that were found throughout the 200 examples with both question tags.

	Cross-gender conversation	Male conversation	Female conversation	Total
Right	88%	9%	3%	100%
Isn't it	81%	14%	5%	100%

Table 8: Summary of conversational types found in BNC

Table 8 shows that cross-gendered communication appears to be the most frequent in the BNC. Due to Marche and Peterson's study (1993), it can be expected that speakers' behavior might be slightly different, and that both male/female speakers might be employing more question tags throughout the conversation in contrast to how they would normally employ them. If acknowledging Marche and Peterson's (1993) hypothesis as valid, it might be expected that Lakoff's hypothesis that women tend to employ question tags more often than men (due to the fact that they represent the powerless participants within the conversation and that they are not certain of the factuality of the presented information, or they are attempting to avoid any responsibility for their statements) can be proven wrong due to the behavioral change towards speakers of the other gender.

4.4.2 Speakers' gender

The table below summarizes how many male and female speakers employed each question tag of the 200 examples in total.

	Male	%	Female	%	Total	Total %
Right	66	66%	34	34%	100	100%
Isn't it	46	46%	54	54%	100	100%

Table 9: Summary of male/female speakers

Table 9 shows that the overall usage of question tags was predominant with male speakers with the question tag *right*. In contrast to results associated with the question tag *right*, the question tag *isn't it* prevails in this category. Further exploration is needed in regard to the cross-gender conversations, where it will be particularly interesting to see whether the usage distribution will be more dominant with either male or female speakers. See the table below for the cross-gender speaker results:

	Male	%	Female	%	Total	Total %
Right	57	64,7%	31	35,3%	88	100%
Isn't it	39	48,2%	42	51,8%	81	100%

Table 10: Cross-gender speaker preference

Table 10 summarizes how male/female speakers used question tags in the cross-gender conversations. The data with the question tag *right* are quite surprising, as male speakers chose to use a question tag 64.7% of the time, whereas female speakers only 35.3% of the time. Due to Marche and Peterson's study (1993), it was expected that the question tag's gender related usage will be somewhat even, but the question tag *right* shows that male speakers opt to employ this linguistic device almost twice as much as female speakers in cross-gender conversations. Keeping in mind Table 9 (number of male speakers 66% and female only 34%), the results are not surprising, as there was no potential for a significant change in data. Cross-gender conversation is the predominant one found in the BNC and the same-sex conversation (either of them, i.e. male or female one) were found only in a small minority of cases. Once the reader keeps that in mind he/she can infer that table 9 already shows relevant data.

In contrast to *right*, the question tag *isn't it* offers evenly distributed preferences among both male and female speakers. Female speakers represent the smaller majority in the overall usage of the question tag, but male speakers are falling by only 3.6%. It may be Lakoff's hypothesis (1975) that women's language is more polite or that women's vocabulary is larger in comparison to men's is reflected in the results. Considering the nature of *right* as a question tag – an invariant question tag that is used in more informal contexts - Lakoff's hypothesis can thus be confirmed as female speakers tend not to use the question tag as much as male speakers, whose language is more vulgar, straightforward and direct, as Lakoff suggests.

4.4.3 Speakers' age

Speakers' age showed to also be an important variable. The only restriction in this paper is that in a few cases, the age of the speaker was not always provided by the BNC, which is responsible for certain limitations in the research. Despite the lack of some data, the results clearly show that both question tags attract an audience of various ages.

	0-14yrs	15-24yrs	25-34yrs	35-44yrs	45-59yrs	60+	Unknown	Total
Right	9	9	20	27	31	3	1	100
Isn't it	6	6	12	9	38	14	15	100

Table 11: Speakers' gender

The question tag *right* is missing one input data about the age of the speaker, whereas *isn't it* misses 15 inputs. Despite this data inconsistency, it is apparent that each question tag attracts different age groups. The question tag *right* is employed much more by younger age groups (from 0-14 years to 45-59 years the tag shows majority in usage). The age group 60+ years old demonstrates interesting behavior by employing the tag only 3 times.

Isn't it, on the other hand, exhibits major usage among the two oldest age groups, 45-59 years and 60+ years old. Despite the question tag lacking data, it is noticed that it is employed and used to a larger extent among older generations in contrast to the question tag *right*.

Yet again, the main driving force for these may lie in the formality of expression of both question tags. Whereas younger people tend to be more informal, use new, innovative expressions and slang, the older generation does not know these expressions and opts to choose the standard, neutral expressions which well known to them.

4.4.3.1 Gender and speakers' age

It would be interesting to compare whether certain preferences also arise with the usage of question tags shown by male/female speakers age groups. The following table summarizes the usage of question tags against gender and age groups.

word	0-14yrs	15-24yrs	25-34yrs	35-44yrs	45-59yrs	60+yrs	Total
Right Female	4	7 ⁸	8	8	6	1	99
Right Male	5	2	12	19	25	2	
Isn't it Female	1	4	5	4	13	8	85
Isn't it Male	5	2	7	5	25	6	

Table 12: Gender preferences within age groups

It is evident from Table 12 that preferences arise. However, before delving into greater detail as to which preferences arise, Table 9 needs to be considered again (see page 49). Owing to the smaller number of male/female speakers with both question tags, the results with the question tag *right* are to be expected. The overall number of male speakers outweighs the number of female speakers by almost twice the amount (male speakers found in 66 instances whereas female only in 34 instances). These numbers are not surprising. With question tag *isn't it*, the data should be much more interesting as the overall number of male speakers was 46 and the number of female speakers was 56. Although there is still majority of male speakers, the difference between the two categories is not as large in scale as with the question tag *right*, and as such it can provide more interesting data. Also, one needs to keep in mind that in certain cases, the age data could not be extracted and therefore Table 12 has the total column to be a reminder of this fact.

It is evident from Table 12 that the question tag *right* exhibits much bigger correlations and preferences within each age group. Especially in categories 25-34 years, 35-44 years and 45-59 years it can be observed that male speakers prevail within these age groups. It is not the case with the question tag *isn't it*, where the same age groups are much more balanced with the exception of 45-59 years age group where male speakers also predominate. Otherwise, the male/female speaker distribution is somewhat equal, and the differences are much smaller.

In the age group 45-59 years, both question tags exhibit the largest male/female difference in usage. The difference in distribution is with question tag *right* – 19 occurrences in contrast to 12 occurrences with the question tag *isn't it*.

The age group 15-24 years old also yields interesting data, as only female speakers' usage dominates with both question tags. Female speakers also preponderate with the question tag *isn't it* within the age group 60+ years. Apart from these three instances, male speakers consistently use a higher number of question tags than female speakers.

⁸ Numbers in italics indicate those occurrences which acquired majority among the speakers.

However, all data might change once percentage is calculated. At first sight, it might appear that male speakers prevail in the number of occurrences, but once percentage usage is counted, the overall results change completely. The reason for such a change is that the result is calculated within the relevant category (only female total number of occurrences) and not against male number of occurrences and vice versa. Table below summarizes the data.

	0-14yrs	15-24yrs	25-34yrs	35-44yrs	45-59yrs	60+yrs	Total
Right Female	<i>11,9%</i> ⁹	20,6%	23,9%	23,9%	17,7%	2%	99
Right Male	8,4%	3%	18,9%	28,8%	37,9%	3%	100%
Isn't it Female	2,6%	<i>17,9%</i>	12,9%	10,3%	38,2%	<i>23,1%</i>	85
Isn't it Male	<i>10,9%</i>	2,2%	<i>15,1%</i>	<i>10,9%</i>	50%	10,9%	100%

Table 13: *Percentage usage of question tags within age groups*

Once percentage is regarded, it is evident that the results completely change, and that women's usage actually prevails as the usage within most age groups. The results that remain the same are the male majority in the age group 45-59 years and female majority within 15-24 years. Apart from that, relevant to the number of occurrences of the relevant gender, it can be seen that women actually tend to use question tags more often in all but 45-59 years and 60+ years age groups with the question tag *right*.

Male speakers, on the other hand, dominate in more age groups with the question tag *isn't it*. Male speakers acquire majority in all but 15-24 years and 60+ years age groups. Such a result is almost the exact opposite of the question tag *right*. It is also interesting to look where the biggest variants lie in the usage of both question tags, i.e. where is the biggest gap between the gender usages. When looking simply at the number of occurrences, the largest gaps were found within age groups 35-44 and 45-59 years. When the percentage usage is taken into account the largest gaps appear with the age groups 0-14, 45-59 and 60+ years.

4.4.4 Gender and pragmatic functions

4.4.4.1 Cross-gender conversation

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, previous studies have shown that both male and female speakers might change the way they usually communicate when talking with the speaker of the opposite sex. Specifically, men are more likely to employ *epistemic* functions whereas women are more like to employ *facilitative* functions (Moore and Podesva,

⁹ Numbers in italics indicate those occurrences which acquired majority among the speakers.

2009). The following sections discuss the pragmatic functions usage preferred by both speakers of both genders in either same-sex or cross-gender conversations.

4.4.4.1.1 *Right* in cross-gender conversations

The following table summarizes the usage of pragmatic functions in cross-gender conversations with the question tag *right*.

	Epistemic uncertainty	Epistemic confirmatory	Facilitative	Softening criticism	Softening directive	Challenging	To tal
Male	19	14	9	0	15	0	57
Female	9	12	4	0	4	2	31

Table 14: Gender preferences of the usage of question tag *right* in cross-gender conversation

As is evident from Table 14, the distribution of the question tag *right* is less even as might have been anticipated. Surprisingly, male speakers employ the *epistemic uncertainty* function the most. The second most employed function by male speakers is the *softening directive* function, which actually goes in accord with Lakoff's hypothesis (1975) that male speakers are much more direct and straightforward in their communication. The third most utilized pragmatic function is *epistemic confirmatory* which falls behind the *softening directive* function by just one occurrence. Female speakers' results are less surprising as they tend to employ both the *epistemic confirmatory* and the *uncertainty* functions the most. Interestingly enough, the *facilitative* function is only used as a third most utilized function. Such results indicate discrepancies with Lakoff's theory (1975) that female speakers are supposed to be the facilitators of the conversation and that they always invite other participants to contribute to the discourse. Further, the *facilitative* function shares third place with the *softening directive* function. This result is the opposite of what Lakoff stated. Due to the variability of the results and the limited samples, no clear conclusion can be made except for the fact that the question tag's usage is more variable as it might have been during Lakoff's times. On the other hand, the *epistemic* function usage is in accordance with Lakoff's hypothesis that women tend to be less certain of the truthfulness of the information they are presenting; how they need to either verify or confirm the truth.

4.4.4.1.2 *Isn't it* in cross-gender conversations

Table 15 summarizes the usage of pragmatic functions in cross-gender conversation with the question tag *isn't it*.

	Epistemic uncertainty	Epistemic confirmatory	Facilitative	Softening criticism	Softening directive	Challenging	Total
Male	11	10	15	2	0	1	39
Female	11	12	17	1	0	1	42

Table 15: Gender preferences of the usage of question tag *isn't it* in cross-gender conversation

The overall number of male/female speakers needs to be considered – 42 female speakers and 39 male speakers, which suggests that the usage is more, even with the question tag *isn't it*. Table 15 shows that both male/female speakers tend to employ the pragmatic functions similarly, and no extreme differences arise from the analysis. Contrary to Moore and Podesva's (2009) study, men employed the *facilitative* function the most (in contrast to their statement that they would employ the *epistemic* function the most). The results concerning female speakers are not surprising, as women are in general regarded as inviting, welcoming facilitators of the conversation and therefore it is no surprise that they choose to use the *facilitative* function the most.

4.4.4.1.3 Comparison of both question tags in cross-gender conversations

Several interesting results are to be noticed from the analysis of cross-gender conversations – specifically that the distribution, or perhaps preferences, of the pragmatic functions differ with both question tags. Whereas the question tag *isn't it* shows that both male/female speakers employ the pragmatic functions in a similar manner, as there are no major discrepancies in the number of occurrences with each pragmatic function, the question tag *right* indicates to be more variable in the sense that both male/female speakers show divergence in usage. Especially the *epistemic uncertainty* and *softening directive* functions show that male speakers predominate in the usage of these pragmatic functions. The result concerning the *softening directive* function is consistent with Lakoff's hypothesis (1975) that men are more assertive in conversations. However, when the *epistemic uncertainty* function is reckoned against the claim that men are more assertive in conversation, this suggests that the direct refutation of Lakoff's hypothesis as this pragmatic function signals that the speaker is not the powerful one in the conversation.

Perhaps the reason for such results lies in the stylistic aspect of both question tags. As was already mentioned in the theoretical part (sections 2.2. and 2.3.), women are in general regarded as the polite speakers who often use hypercorrect grammar. Since the question tag *right* is an invariant question tag, it may be less attractive to a female speaker and thus she opts for a more formal choice of a question tag even within informal contexts.

4.4.4.2 Same-sex conversations

4.4.4.2.1 Male conversations

The below table summarizes the pragmatic usage in same-sex male conversations with both question tags.

	Epistemic uncertainty	Epistemic confirmatory	Facilitative	Softening criticism	Softening directive	Challenging	Total
Right	2	2	3	0	2	0	9
Isn't it	5	0	6	2	0	1	14

Table 16: Male conversation pragmatic function preferences

Even though the same-sex male conversations appeared in only a small minority, within the 100 examples with either of the question tags, especially with question tag *right* it can be inferred that the speakers in the cross-gender conversation did not change their behavior when talking to opposite sex. All of the pragmatic functions are used evenly even within same-sex conversation. The distribution is similar to such an extent that no particular conclusions can be made (especially when bearing in mind that only 9 conversations serve as a sample for analysis).

Isn't it, in contrast to *right*, exhibits preferences towards certain types of pragmatic functions. Whereas in the cross-gender conversation, male speakers opted the most for *facilitative*, *epistemic uncertainty* and *epistemic confirmatory* functions in the same-sex conversations the *epistemic confirmatory* function is not represented at all. Such a result might indicate that either male speakers involved in the cross-gender conversation changed their conversational behavior due to a female participant present, or that the sample of male conversations with the occurrence of *isn't it* was rather small.

4.4.4.2.2 Female conversations

The table below summarizes the usage of pragmatic functions by female speakers in same-sex female conversations.

	Epistemic uncertainty	Epistemic confirmatory	Facilitative	Softening criticism	Softening directive	Challenging	Total
Right	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Isn't it	1	2	1	1	0	0	5

Table 17: Female conversation pragmatic function preferences

Similarly, to male same-sex conversations, the sample of the female same-sex is rather limiting in contrast to the cross-gender results. Due to the limited number of samples, it is impossible to draw any conclusions from the analyzed data. The only conclusion that can be

inferred is that even from such a limited sample both question tags invite variety as almost all pragmatic functions are represented in the samples.

5 Conclusion

The subject of the present study is the analysis of the question tags *right* and *isn't it*. The paper focuses mainly on the question tags from the sociolinguistic perspective (i.e. the question tags in connection to gender of the speakers as well as related to their gender). The analysis itself is based on 200 examples of question tags found in the BNC. The BNC was chosen as a primary source of material due to a larger variety of speakers found within the corpus as well as a larger variety of conversations. Further query restrictions had to be made when searching for the question tags (i.e. preceding punctuation of the question tag or speakers' gender).

The analysis shows that declarative sentences seem to be the most utilized sentence types preceding question tags, confirming Quirk et al.' (1985) and Biber et al.'s (1999) assertions. The analysis also further supports the claim that other sentence types can precede question tags as well, only not as frequently. Interestingly enough, fragmented utterances frequently preceded both question tags. The reason for such an occurrence is most likely due to the spoken nature of the excerpts. Undoubtedly, such fragmented utterances would not appear in formal and/or written contexts.

A major part of the empirical part represents the analysis of pragmatic functions of the two question tags. The classification is largely inspired by Holmes' research from 1995, but modifications are made; these are inspired by Algeo's research from 2004. Context is an essential part for the analysis of pragmatic functions. To get valid samples of the question tags, conversational context had to be searched for and further examined with every example so that a decision about the pragmatic function could be made. The analysis showed that both question tags exhibit a larger variety in terms of pragmatic functions. Nevertheless, the question tag *right* is employed in a greater variety of pragmatic functions in contrast to *isn't it*. While the question tag *right* is clearly employed, the most in the *epistemic modal* functions (both *epistemic uncertainty* and *epistemic confirmation* functions acquired 31% of occurrences within the 100 examples), it shows greater usage especially in the *softening* pragmatic function (specifically, the *softening directive* function). The *facilitative* function appears to be the second most employed pragmatic function with both question tags after the *epistemic modal* functions. An interesting contrast arose between the two question tags when analyzing the *epistemic uncertainty* function – whereas the question tag *right* was employed only in the work environment contexts, the question tag *isn't it* was used more in formal situations such as education. The main motivation behind such choice of words might lie in the level of formality and also in the familiarity between the speakers. The *facilitative* function appeared in 16% of the instances with the question tag *right* and in 38% with the question tag *isn't it*. The *facilitative*

function with the question tag *isn't it* seems to be employed at the cost of employment of the *softening* pragmatic functions. Such high occurrences of the *facilitative* function cause much lowered occurrences of the *softening* function. The *softening* pragmatic function also shows interesting results, i.e. that it appears only with the question tag *right* whereas the *softening criticism* function appears only with the question tag *isn't it*. When comparing the occurrence with these question tags, the *softening directive* function definitely shows that it is utilized more (20 occurrences) in contrast to the *softening criticism* function (had only 3 occurrences). The last pragmatic function, *challenging*, appears to be utilized the least with both question tags (occurred only in 3% of instances with the question tag *isn't it* and 2% with the question tag *right*). The *challenging* function seems to be used in the context of annoyance towards the addressee directly involved in the conversation with the question tag *right*. However, such results are not emerging with the question tag *isn't it* as the speakers were annoyed by actions of a third person, who was not directly present in the conversation.

Another section of the analysis studied addressees' responsiveness towards question tags. While overall statistics suggest that the immediate response (IR) is more common (68% with *isn't it* and 63% with *right*), once the data is analyzed against the pragmatic functions, it differs. The *facilitative* function relies on the addressees' immediate response (IR) did not receive the majority of responses with the question tag *right* (i.e. immediate responses' occurrence is only 5, while postponed responses' is 11). Such lack of responsiveness contradicts the fundamental purpose of the *facilitative* function. Some might argue that due to this matter, the question tag can no longer be taken as an example of the *facilitative* function, however once the addressees' postponed response (PR) is analyzed, it is evident that he/she knew that they were supposed to reply, but were simply not given enough space by the speaker. Hence it could be argued that the speaker is breaking the rule himself/herself. The postponed response was also found more often (2 occurrences in contrast to 1) with the question tag *isn't it*. However, such a result is negligible for there are not enough samples available for a reliable study.

The pragmatic function aspect of the analysis was further inspected in connection with the sociolinguistic perspective. While linguists such as Moore and Podesva (2009) claim that the difference between the question tag's usage is no longer as clear-cut as Lakoff (1975) points out, they admit that context and pragmatic functions are extremely essential in analyzing these topics. An interesting point is also made by Bilous and Kraus (1993), who claim that speakers can behave differently towards speakers of the opposite sex and that therefore not only context, but also the type of conversation (i.e. same-sex or cross-gender) represents an important variable. The analysis showed that cross-gender communication appears to be the most

common one with both question tags (88% with *right* and 81% with *isn't it*), followed by only male conversations (14% with *isn't it* and 9% with *right*), the female conversations having the least common occurrence (i.e. 5% with *isn't it* and 3% with *right*). If Bilous and Kraus' perspective is taken as a given, then already at this point Lakoff's hypothesis can be in major disadvantage due to the behavioral changes. Directly related to either proving or disproving Lakoff's hypothesis is to analyze the gender of speakers. Out of 100 instances with the question tag *right*, 66% were male and 34% were female speakers; with the question tag *isn't it*, the distribution was 54% female and 46% male speakers. Once the cross-gender statistics are analyzed, it is discovered that the question tag *right* invites a smaller diversity in usage, as 64,7% users of the question tag were male speakers. Opposite to this result was the much more balanced usage with the question tag *isn't it*, which showed that female speakers employed the tag in 51,8% against 48,2% of male speakers. Lakoff's (1975) hypothesis about female discourse being polite might be valid and that is why women employed *isn't it* more than *right*.

Another variable that was studied was speakers' age. The analysis showed that both question tags attract different age groups, i.e. while both question tags have shown usage across all age groups, there are slight preferences observed. The question tag *right* attracts younger people much more, and is used by the older generation (i.e. 60+ years old) only rarely, whereas the question tag *isn't it* attracts older speakers (i.e. age groups 45-59 years and 60+ years old acquired 61,2% of occurrences). Formality of question tags could be also a key factor again – while the younger generation tends to prefer the invariant question tag *right* as it is more innovative and informal, the older generation prefers the more formal question tag *isn't it*.

Male/female speaker preferences were also considered within age groups. While at first sight it might seem as if female speakers are falling behind male speakers (occurrence-wise), once the percentage was calculated, the data showed that female speakers actually prevail in the following age groups: 0-14, 15-24, 25-34 and 35-44 years old with the question tag *right*. Interestingly enough, the results with the question tag *isn't it* proved to be almost the opposite, i.e. that male speakers predominated in 0-14, 25-34, 35-44 and 45-59 years old age groups, with female speakers acquiring majority only in 15-24 and 60+ years old age groups (for full results see Table 13). Such results contrast Lakoff's hypothesis which stated that women's discourse is politer, where clearly the data shows that female speakers use invariant, less formal question tags more than men once percentages are counted.

Speakers' gender was also considered in connection to pragmatic functions and types of conversations. Moore and Podesva (2009) claim that speakers might prefer certain pragmatic functions to others. The analysis showed that certain preferences arise (see Table 14). The

results question Lakoff's hypothesis, who stated that women are the facilitators of the conversation and that they as well are not certain of the truthfulness of the presented information. Results in this analysis indicate that male speakers actually use the *epistemic* function much more frequently (be it *epistemic uncertainty* or *epistemic confirmatory*). The only results that is in accord with Lakoff's hypothesis concerns *softening directive* function where male speakers prevail – Lakoff (1975) has stated that male discourse is direct and straightforward, and as such, male speakers' usage of the *softening directive* criteria actually supports such hypothesis. Female speakers, surprisingly, employed the most the *epistemic confirmatory* function, immediately followed by *epistemic uncertainty* function which would support Lakoff's hypothesis. Same-sex conversations were studied as well, as it would be interesting to examine if any divergence in behavior arise. Contrastive results arose when the *epistemic confirmatory* pragmatic function did not appear in same-sex male conversation, whereas in the cross-gender conversations it is the second most utilized, with the question tag *isn't it*. These results might directly support the hypothesis that speakers can alter their behavior when speaking to the opposite sex.

Overall, this research hopes to have provided a comprehensive analysis of the question tags *right* and *isn't it* and to have contributed to analysis of their various pragmatic functions.

6 References and Sources

- Algeo, J. (1988). "The Tag Question in British English: It's a Different I'n'it?" *English World-Wide* 9: 171-191.
- Algeo, J. (1990). It's a Myth, Innit? Politeness and the English Tag Question pp. 443-450 in Ricks, Ch. And Michaels, L. (eds). *The State of Language*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Algeo, J. (2006). *British or American English?* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Allerton, D. (2009). Tag Questions in G. Rohdenburg & J. Schlüter (Eds.). *One Language, Two Grammars? Differences between British and American English* (Studies in English Language, pp. 306-323). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, D. (2015). 'Tag Questions' *ELT Journal* 69.3: 314 – 318.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.
- Cameron et al. (1988). "Lakoff in Context: The Social and Linguistic Functions of Tag Questions." *Women's Language: Critical Approaches*.
- Cameron, D., McAlinden, F. and O'Leary, K. (1989). "Lakoff in Context: The Social and Linguistic Functions of Tag Questions" pp. 74-93 in Coates, J. and Cameron, D. (eds) *Women in Their Speech Communities*. Longman: London.
- Cheshire, J. (1982). *Variation in an English Dialect*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Coates, J. (2004). *Women, Men and Language*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Dubois, B.L. & Crouch, I. (1975). "The question of tag questions in women's speech: they don't really use more of them, do they?" *Language in Society* 4: 289-294.
- Dušková, L. a kol. (1988) *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny*. Praha: Academia.
- Eckhert, P. (2003). *Language and Gender*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes, J. (1984). "Hedging Your Bets and Sitting on the Fence: Some Evidence for Hedges as Support Structures." *Te Reo* 27: 47-62.
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Men and Politeness*. Longman: London.
- Holmes, J. (1998). "Women's talk: the question of sociolinguistic universals," pp. 461-483 in Coates, J. (ed.) *Language and Gender: A Reader*. Blackwell: London.
- Huddleston, R. & Pullum G.K. (2002) *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: University Press.

- Humm, M. (1989). *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Michigan University: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Jones, D. (1980). Gossip: notes on women's oral culture, pp. 193-198 in Kramarae, Ch. (ed.) *The Voices and Words of Women and Men*. Pergamon Press: Oxford.
- Kramae, C. and Treichler, P. (1992). *Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones: A Feminist Dictionary*. Pandora Press: London.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Moore, E. and Podesva, R. (2009) "Style, indexicality, and the social meaning of tag questions." *Language in Society* 38: 447-485.
- Marche, T.A. and Peterson, Carole (1993). "On The Gender Differential Use of Listener Responsiveness," *Sex Roles* 29.11/12: 795-815.
- Nässlin, S. (1984). *The English Question Tag: A Study of Sentences Containing Tags of the Type Isn't it?, is it?* Almqvist and Wiksell International: Stockholm.
- O'Barr, W. and Atkins, B.K. (1980). "Women's language or powerless language?" pp. 93-110 in McConnell-Ginet, Sally, Borker, Ruth and Furman, Nelly (eds.) *Women Language in Literature and Society*. Praeger: New York.
- Penelope, J. (1990). *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues*. Pergamon Press: University of California.
- Quirk R., Greenbaum S., Leech G. & Svartvik J. (1985) *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Siegler, D. and Siegler, R. (1976). "Stereotypes of male's and females' speech." *Psychological Reports*. 39: 167-170.
- Spender, D. (1990). *Man Made Language*. Routledge: London.
- Tannen, D. (1991). *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. Virago: London.
- Thorne, B., Kramarae, Ch. and Henley, N. (1983). *Language, Gender and Society*. Newbury House: Rowley, MA.
- Tottie, G. and Hoffman, S. (2006) "Tag Questions in British and American English" *Journal of English Linguistics* 34.4.: 283-311.
- Tottie, G. and Hoffman, S. (2009) "Tag Questions in English" *Journal of English Linguistics* 37.2.: 130-161.
- Trudgill, P. (1972). "Sex, cover prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich" *Language in Society* 1:179-195.

West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (1987). "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1.2.: 125-151.

7 Resumé

Tato studie se zabývá tázacími dovětky *right* a *isn't it* ze sociolingvistického hlediska. Studie zkoumá jejich využití v běžné mluvě se zaměřením na pragmatické funkce, které tázací dovětky vykazují. Pragmatická perspektiva je potom aplikována na sociolingvistický kontext, ve kterém je zkoumáno především pohlaví mluvčích, jaké pragmatické funkce mají mluvčí tendenci využívat, případně zda tázací dovětky přitahují rozdílné věkové skupiny mluvčích. Analýza poukázala na zajímavé výsledky, i co se týče schopnosti reagovat na tázací dovětky ze strany příjemců konverzace, proto byla analýza rozšířena o tuto problematiku. Další zajímavostí výzkumu byly větné typy předcházející tázací dovětky – vzhledem k velkému výskytu tzv. fragmentů bylo téma této práce rozšířeno také o tuto podkapitolu.

V teoretické části jsou oba tázací dovětky rozebrány jak z formálního hlediska, tak z hlediska sociolingvistického nebo pragmatického. Mimo jiné teoretická část také rozebírá sociolingvistiku a její vývoj, především jak sociolingvisté přistupují k jazyku či případně jaké jsou největší rozdíly mezi mluvou mužů a žen.

Práce je metodologicky založená na 200 příkladech získaných z Britského národního korpusu (dále zmíněno pouze jako BNC), z nichž se 100 příkladů týká tázacího dovětku *right* a zbylých 100 se týká *isn't it*. Vzhledem k povaze této práce byl v korpusu zvolen pouze mluvený diskurz mluvčích (tj. nahrané konverzace), aby bylo možné získat skutečně spontánní konverzace, které nebyly předem připravené. Původně bylo zamýšleno využít americký korpus Santa Barbara, ale vzhledem k malému počtu mluvčích (v korpusu se vyskytuje přibližně 10 nahraných konverzací s průměrně 2-3 účastníky) byl tento korpus zavrhnut z důvodu malé různorodosti mluvčích a potažmo také konverzací.

Analýza potvrzuje Quirkovo a Biberovo tvrzení, že oznamovací věty nejčastěji předchází tázací dovětky, a to v 76,1 % případů s dovětkem *right* a 95,2 % případů s dovětkem *isn't it*. Tyto výsledky mimo jiné naznačují, že tázací dovětek *right* nabízí větší různorodost, jelikož ho předchází i jiné větné typy, které v porovnání s tázacím dovětkem *isn't it* mají mnohem větší procentuální výskyt (například rozkazovací věty se vyskytovaly s dovětkem *right* v 18,5 % případů, zatímco s dovětkem *isn't it* pouze v 2,4 %). Ani u jednoho z dovětků nebyl nalezený zvolací větný typ, ale vzhledem k počtu příkladů nelze vyvodit žádné závěry, které by tvrdily, že zvolací věty jsou jediným větným typem, který tázací dovětky nepředchází. Zajímavostí této sekce je výskyt fragmentů, tj. vět skládajících se z pár slov, většinou bez-slovesného typu, ze kterých není možné určit větný typ konstrukce. Tyto konstrukce byly nalezeny častěji s tázacím dovětkem *isn't it* (16 výskytů oproti 4 výskytům s dovětkem *right*).

Další část analýzy se zabývá pragmatickými funkcemi obou tázacích dovětků. Tato podkapitola je z velké části inspirovaná klasifikacemi pragmatických funkcí podle Holmesové (1995) a Algeho (2006). Je nutné dodat, že klasifikace využitá v této práci je modifikovanou verzí obou těchto klasifikací. Veškeré výsledky v této části jsou podloženy příklady, ve kterých je podrobně popsán kontext, bez kterého by nebylo možné pragmatickou funkci určit. Kapitola 4. 2. potvrzuje tvrzení Tottie a Hoffmanové (2006), které se přiklání k teorii, že nejčastěji využívanými pragmatickými funkcemi jsou *epistemická modální* a *facilitativní* funkce; obě tyto funkce převládají oproti funkcím ostatním. *Epistemická modální* (a to jak informativní, tak nejistotní) získala 62 % s tázacím dovětkem *right*, zatímco u tázacího dovětku *isn't it* se tato vyskytovala pouze v 56 % případů. Naopak funkce *facilitativní* převládá u dovětku *isn't it*, a to 38 % oproti 16 % s tázacím dovětkem *right*. Tázací dovětek *right* opět ukazuje, že nabízí mnohem větší různorodost než *isn't it* – ačkoliv tato různorodost jde na úkor *facilitativní* funkce, tak tento dovětek ukazuje, že i v *zmírňující* (*softening*) funkci vykazuje 20% výskyt, oproti 3% výskytu s dovětkem *isn't it*. Naopak *vyzývající* (*challenging*) se u obou dovětků vyskytuje pouze v 3 % případů.

Třetí sekce analýzy se zabývá přímými reakcemi příjemců na tázací dovětky mluvčích, které mohou být chápány jako výzvy či nabídky k zapojení do komunikace. Tato kapitola ukazuje, že tázací dovětky skutečně vyžadují přímou odpověď ze strany příjemce, ale vyskytují se zde také případy, kdy se přímé odpovědi mluvčí nedostane. Jakkoliv jsou tyto odložené reakce na tázací dovětky ojedinělé, je důležité zmínit, že nejčastější příčinou jejich výskytu je samotný mluvčí, který nepustí dalšího účastníka konverzace ke slovu. Reakce na tázací dovětky byly zkoumány v souvislosti s pragmatickými funkcemi. Zajímavé zjištění bylo nalezeno u *facilitativní* funkce u dovětku *right* – ačkoliv tato funkce vyžaduje přímou reakci adresáta, tak v tomto případě nebylo tomuto požadavku vyhověno. Přímá odpověď byla nalezena pouze pětkrát, zatímco odložená odpověď byla nalezena jedenáctkrát. U tázacího dovětku *isn't it* převažovala odložená odpověď pouze v případě *vyzývavé* funkce, nicméně v tomto případě byl vzorek tak malý (2 výskyty odložené odpovědi a 1 přímé odpovědi), že nelze vyvozovat žádné závěry. Ve všech ostatních případech převládala odpověď přímá. Je nutné dodat, že v případě odložené odpovědi u *facilitativní* funkce se vždy adresát vyjádřil k větě, ve které se tázací dovětek vyskytoval. Potřeba vyjádřit se k dané problematice byla pro adresáty tak veliká, že ani neumožnění zapojení se do konverzace ze strany mluvčího jim nezabránila vyjádřit se později.

Poslední kapitola analýzy se zabývá mluvčími (tj. jejich pohlavím, věkem a také typem konverzací). Typ konverzace (tj. pokud účastníci konverzace byli stejného či opačného pohlaví)

byl zkoumán především na základě Marche a Petersonovy studie z roku 1993, ve které tvrdili, že mluvčí mohou měnit své chování v rámci konverzace, pokud je adresátem mluvčí opačného pohlaví. Na základě tohoto výroku se zaměřilo na mluvčí tázacích dovětků v rámci konverzací mezi mluvčími rozdílných pohlaví (muž a žena), ale také stejného pohlaví (konverzace pouze mezi muži a nebo pouze mezi ženami). Ukázalo se, že převládají konverzace mezi mluvčími obou pohlaví (88 % s dovětkem *right* a 81 % s dovětkem *isn't it*, dále pak následovány mužskou konverzací a na posledním místě byla čistě ženská konverzace. Ukázalo se také, že mužských mluvčích bylo více než ženských s tázacím dovětkem *right* (66 % mužských mluvčích oproti 34 % ženských mluvčích). Tázací dovětek *isn't it* využívaly víc ženy než muži (54 % ženských mluvčích oproti 46 % mužských mluvčích).

Tato data byla také zanalyzována v rámci smíšených konverzací, tedy konverzací, během kterých byli přítomni zástupci jak mužského, tak ženského pohlaví. Ukázalo se, že výsledky zůstaly stejné – muži využívali tázacího dovětku *right* více než ženy, zatímco u tázacího dovětku *isn't it* byly výsledky opačné. Mimo jiné se studie zaměřila také na preference tázacích dovětků z hlediska věkových skupin. Bylo zjištěno, že oba tázací dovětky jsou skutečně využívány jinými věkovými skupinami – zatímco tázací dovětek *right* je využíván spíše mluvčími mladších věkových skupin (přesněji ve všech skupinách od 0 do 44 let získalo *right* většinu), tázací dovětek *isn't it* je využíván především mluvčími starší generace (především ve věku od 45 let). Důvodem pro tyto preference může být rozdílná formalita obou tázacích dovětků. Tázací dovětek *right* je představitelem tzv. invariabilních dovětků, které jsou využívány často v neformálních kontextech (viz sekce 4. 2.), zatímco *isn't it* je považováno za prototypický tázací dovětek, který se často vyskytuje ve formálních kontextech (jako například v univerzitním prostředí mezi studenty a profesory). Tento stylistický rozdíl mezi oběma dovětky může být zodpovědný za to, že mladší generace tíhne k neformálnosti, zatímco starší generace k formalitě výrazu. V poslední řadě se studie také zabývala pohlavím mluvčích v souvislosti s jejich využitím pragmatických funkcí. Bylo zjištěno, že tázací dovětek *right* vykazuje větší variabilitu oproti tázacímu dovětku *isn't it*. Muži využívají větší spektrum pragmatických funkcí, zatímco ženy mají tendence využívat především *epistemickou modální* a *facilitativní* funkci. Muži naopak jednoznačně ovládli *zmírňující* (softening) funkci. Důvodem může být hypotéza Lakoffové (1975), která považuje mužský diskurz za mnohem asertivnější, zatímco ženy mají tendenci být mnohem zdvořilejší a naopak se snaží nebýt direktivními mluvčími.

Tato studie usilovala nejen o zmapování pragmatických funkcí obou tázacích dovětek, ale také o analyzování dovětek v sociolingvistickém kontextu, který byl často zohledněn i přenesen na pragmatický kontext.

8 Appendix

Appendix 1: Question tag *right*

1.	FM2 1895	so it's gonna piss it down any minute, right?
2.	JT1 106	So, answer the question, right?
3.	JSY 461	If you, in case A, if you imagine that you're presented with with a piece of paper or card and it has two symbols on it, right?
4.	KD9 1882	And I get up about [pause] half four, right?
5.	KD9 1955	But his car's over there, right?
6.	KDS 1719	I never did one of these, right?
7.	JAA 611	It will be exactly the same place, it will have gone all the way round, right?
8.	KD7 588	go up and borrow Matt's, get your dressing gown on and make yourself some toast, right?
9.	J3N 73	Yeah [pause] minutes of the previous A G M proposed and seconded, right?
10.	KDH 1784	Well if , well if you [pause] you were supposed have overtime set up, right?
11.	KBF 13398	Getting over a cold, right?
12.	H5N 139	He's gonna see him again, don't get me wrong, Doctor [gap:name] said he'll send for the both of us, right?
13.	KDS 1387	Just er er why we had only three, right?
14.	KDS 1707	It's taking your [pause] it's taking everyone's erm [pause] view [pause] sim-- simultaneously, right?
15.	KE4 1976	Just depends, right?
16.	H5N 201	at school, right?
17.	KD0 3355	Well I'll do a I know I'll do a Christmas section then, right?
18.	KDJ 35	I'm talking about cord and five lines here for the minute [pause] aye [pause] and I'm talking about bringing in [pause] talking about bringing in four or five lines down there, right?
19.	JP4 1076	Right, so if we're in a helicopter up here, and this ship says the bearing is seventy five degrees, right?
20.	KCX 7844	But they will give him a bed if he's got him right, right?

21.	GYR 188	T V is rated at [pause] a hundred and twenty watts, right?
22.	KPG 4109	And you know Easter after the two weeks, right?
23.	KBF 3618	That's how they do them, right?
24.	KCC 182	She had a box full for Christmas, she ate three odd one, right?
25.	KE2 2279	posts are erected every hundred metres, right?
26.	K7F 288	Erm let's see [pause] This is a reservoir of water, right?
27.	KP3 2803	And you're going to see it, right?
28.	KCY 2455	load it, sort it out and print it, right?
29.	KD5 8474	So [unclear] occur on that, right?
30.	KD5 9515	Yeah, but I mean that one [pause] you could of shifted this lot [pause] put some kinks in this one a bit, right?
31.	JP4 1038	So, if I take this bearing, this is a g-- very common question they have in G C S E, take a bearing from J and it's forty five degrees, right?
32.	KDS 1527	That would have been your early marriage, right?
33.	KBH 6234	Mm, the top lake is like very flat water, is a lot of weed and a lot of scum, right?
34.	KD0 3374	You could put that as in as bu-- bum question couldn't you, see if anybody gets it, right?
35.	GYR 1219	Marking the forces on going that way, the easy way to think of it is well what have you got to do to the bottom of the ladder to stop it from, put a piece of rope on here, right?
36.	KD9 640	Hand it in now love, right?
37.	KCE 4642	If you ever get the, if you ever [pause] ever get [unclear] again I'll hit you, right?
38.	KSW 942	She goes, she goes [pause] this is what she did, right?
39.	KLT 521	so week one might be a slide lecture [pause] on the three themes [pause] plus, erm a show and demonstration of board games, right?
40.	KD0 452	and and Joanne Joe, say who could judge this, this is for our competition we'll say Heidi [gap:name] coming, no, is anybody else in it, no [pause] er Sarah'll come in cos she doesn't know, right?
41.	FM7 675	And he was set up to fight crime [pause] federal crime [pause] in America, right?

42.	KD0 1172	So that new Rover has been built so everything fits perfectly, right?
43.	F8D 151	Somebody's slipped over and they've got all the grit in their knuckles in the part of their knuckles and you want to bandage the hand or there's a cut on the hand, even on the palm, we can do that one later when it's really, when it's really a gash, gushing blood we can do this afternoon, I repeat again none of these which you've done this morning will control severe bleeding, get it into your heads this is just to cover to keep infection out, alright, these are not to control severe bleeding just covering a minor wound or a graze, right?

44.	KPD 380	The drivers definitely, well they're voting today, you see, well [unclear] have already accepted that, right?
45.	KR2 794	It's not Saracens, it's another one in the village cos Saracen's i-- in the village, i-- , right?
46.	JJS 297	Now, what we'll do is this [pause] Erm [pause] Get into your table and put a decimal there, now you can choose, I don't mind what you have, right? so you're going to do some like that right.
47.	JT4 918	Because when they say, what did the article say, and you tell them, you're summarising it, right?
48.	KPG 592	Don't even bother stopping, right?
49.	KCN 137	Do you know the woman at the end of our road, right?
50.	KCL 5161	Friday [pause] so it's Wednesday and Friday, right?
51.	GYR 775	Your hose pipe twenty gallons a minute, well you ran that for ten minutes say, so that was two hundred gallons we're going to charge you for there, and your six gallons a minute appliance here, you ran that for forty minutes, right?
52.	GYP 659	So what we'll do is we'll put that, that means take away, right?
53.	KDS 1053	I'm gonna put three, right?
54.	KR2 1607	I had Patrick have that, have this, right?
55.	KLV 508	Sorry it's the other figure, the average age of our new recruits was under twenty one three years ago, right?
56.	KBH 575	It's effectively eighteen thousand per annum saved, right?
57.	KBH 582	But the only way you can get the equity, right?
58.	KBW 2104	They usually [unclear] they usually have a prayer before they go to sleep, right?

59.	KD7 1430	Er [pause] there's a small Escort [pause] mark three Escort, right?
60.	KCA 1362	Well I cleaned all the windows Gordon, right?
61.	FY9 425	So we want to do this is in a sixth of the time, right?
62.	KPD 392	I mean they've got the least [pause] amount of people that are there are so we'll [pause] either that or the end of the day see if it doesn't get banned, right?
63.	KCA 10	I've never seen, do you know the bathroom, right?
64.	KDN 1853	Well see, they're twenty to [unclear] three, right?
65.	KR1 390	You can watch it until quarter past six and no longer, right?
66.	KCX 4662	No in [pause] tt [pause] tur-- erm [pause] turbine we're building, we're building three big'uns, right?
67.	KDM 4896	Oh there's nothing on that one Ken, right?
68.	KBJ 1421	Two times four equals eight, right?
69.	JN6 430	You go for a quick short-term fix, right?
70.	H5N 221	Kept repeating himself and, right?
71.	KC5 292	And when she comes in, what's that one, put her left foot on it, right?
72.	KPE 1612	Well if she lives down Dawson, all she has to do is get a one O six to Clapton, right?
73.	KC7 1281	and he wasn't sure like how, what was the correct way [pause] to reply to it, right?
74.	KD0 2227	He could have this whole of this season to get used to playing, right?
75.	KB6 2197	She comes down here [pause] all I did was put me coat on, right?
76.	HYJ 64	Right, the production cost is say six hundred pounds, right?
77.	KD2 3237	Now, they thought it was only gonna be two because there's only two assessing people, right?
78.	FMR 1269	So [pause] hard water doesn't readily form a lather with soap, right?
79.	KCU 1051	Put them on a plate, right?
80.	KD0 460	Well Mary [gap:name] going to judge it and, would he let her do it on her own, no [pause] he followed her round, making comments here, making comments there, trying to influence

		her [pause] fact is, this'll make you laugh, you know the wall displays [pause] you know th-- erm the books, Where's Wally [pause] [unclear] Where's Wally [pause] you have this [pause] page, of really tiny little things and you have to find Wally, who's [pause] a person, right?
81.	KD0 7188	Every time I say blank there's a word, right?
82.	KGU 1100	You understand that, right?
83.	JP4 772	Right, well you're on a bearing of forty five degrees from me, right?
84.	JP4 1078	And this ship says the bearing is? [unclear] just check that one is two hundred and fifty three degrees, right?
85.	KCA 1367	All the back, right?
86.	KPG 4231	Well we weren't in and Dempsey always used to go up to Jane, right?
87.	K7F 601	Amps amps is current, right?
88.	KD0 1969	I mean Southgate's all the more pleasing when you think he's somebody that's worked his way up, right?
89.	KE4 1026	So you, you be at the main entrance for [pause] at the secretary's office, right, for half past eleven, right?
90.	KD7 3523	We got a excuse for me, right?
91.	KE2 1414	occurred, right?
92.	KP1 5835	You okay, right?
93.	JT2 19	Just totally forget it's there, right?
94.	KBH 6446	[unclear] is something that I would not say to a French lady, something that I could say to my daughter, right?
95.	KCX 3001	Two pound eighty five, it says, for bacon, sausage, egg, fried bread and tomatoes which, anywhere, that's reasonable, right?
96.	KD3 880	Did you slip, right?
97.	J91 988	So, you did so many miles per hour, we calculated, you would have done so many miles if you'd been going for a full hour at that speed, so your dis-- your, your speed, velocity really but we'll call it speed, right?
98.	KP3 2884	This is a half day, right? [unclear] needs a full day [unclear]
99.	GYN 179	There's a fully, basic fully-fashioned look, right?

100.	KPV 3340	Erm, they've got two things, a bidet, a toilet, a corner bath and a corner shower on the other side, right?
------	----------	---

Appendix 2: Question tag *isn't it*

1.	KDB 555	Well that's a bit silly, isn't it?
2.	JJS 153	I don't know, that's the old time honoured way of doing it, isn't it?
3.	KBX 1957	Oh it is, isn't it?
4.	KE3 8828	Apart from his chest he's [pause] the only bit of white on him, isn't it?
5.	KBP 3457	It's a worthwhile job though, isn't it?
6.	KD0 3818	Well that's why you went to Britannia's innit, isn't it?
7.	KCP 2701	It is keeping it off though, isn't it?
8.	JA9 520	to a stage two report, isn't it?
9.	KBK 6824	Yes but caramelly burned, isn't it?
10.	K65 1147	It's rare for a woman, isn't it?
11.	KBH 1162	Then, it's quite a lot to happen, isn't it?
12.	KP1 792	You, it's coming now, isn't it?
13.	H61 1059	Well that's a good name for an installation program, isn't it?
14.	KE6 9640	That's the, that's the whole point, you, you have to start somewhere, yes I can give her a bit of paper, yes she

		can throw it in the bin, it's made no difference, in fact I think it's getting worse since I spoke to her, isn't it?
15.	KBK 5889	Now that's pretty well perfect, isn't it?
16.	KE6 6087	Glen her, Glen [gap:name] they say, isn't it?
17.	KCB 66	Exactly, isn't it?
18.	JTD 498	It's the angle of the road, isn't it?
19.	KD5 1171	Otherwise it's all slimy, isn't it?
20.	KP1 1033	That's what's wrong with it though, isn't it?
21.	FM0 405	I-- it may not be the case, but I think it's possibility you've got to consider, isn't it?
22.	KCD 3371	It is your second, isn't it?
23.	KDM 17060	Monday, isn't it?
24.	JSN 775	That's a case of, it happens in all walks of life, isn't it?
25.	J97 416	I think that's the aberration, isn't it?
26.	KPV 1546	It's such a British thing, isn't it?
27.	KD8 9819	Good God almighty, there's a thing, isn't it?

28.	JA9 550	you on, oh that's still that's the one two, isn't it ?
29.	KDM 8059	that's the smoothing one the little one, isn't it?
30.	KDM 12669	Sunday, isn't it?
31.	KDM 16879	It's awful today, isn't it?
32.	KBF 1800	And it's an automatic, isn't it?

33.	KPA 1748	It's crazy, isn't it?
34.	G3W 455	For [pause] trombone, no, it's not, it's for, yes it's for one of the trombones, isn't it?
35.	JSN 738	And, and if you're right, it's pressure all the time, isn't it?
36.	G5K 1606	That's the way of putting it, isn't it?
37.	FMR 1251	Calcium chloride, isn't it?
38.	H49 956	We well, that doesn't commit us to anything, and doesn't cost any, cost any money, so that application is in, I believe, isn't it?
39.	KC3 3370	[unclear] Breaking the law, isn't it?
40.	KDM 2486	Ah let him have a go, isn't it?
41.	KB7 225	Good walk up there you know, isn't it?
42.	HUW 332	Well it [pause] it may not be helpful, but it is the reality, isn't it?
43.	KBW 6741	we didn't go to school after all, isn't it?
44.	KGU 2067	your reputation's going to be in tatters, isn't it?
45.	K65 1057	I, personality, isn't it?
46.	FXR 786	that's back to me again , isn't it?
47.	KCF 1820	But I said that [pause] and sort of just holding on a level now like, isn't it?
48.	KCN 7271	Yeah, but it-- , it's circulating i-- , isn't it?
49.	K65 1086	that's what you call a family business, isn't it?
50.	J91 1268	is ten percent now, isn't it?
51.	KB7 15526	[unclear] just about, isn't it?
52.	KBD 4842	I think it is, isn't it?
53.	H61 1826	DOS Four, isn't it?
54.	KPV 5484	Right, a lot of money though, isn't it?
55.	G5K 856	This is what you were saying about buying up the time, John in a way, isn't it?
56.	JP4 54	It's just like writing though, isn't it?
57.	FM4 97	So you [pause] you're looking at It's not a question of erm [pause] doing much calculating or anything else, it's just seeing what the problem is, isn't it?

58.	KCB 2633	That's right, yeah, isn't it?
59.	KBG 2266	Yeah but it's flashing just as long for those who bought it first time round, isn't it?
60.	KC0 5203	I think, isn't it?
61.	JP4 488	Forty seven, out, so this is about nine hundred quid, isn't it?
62.	KDM 13979	Oh yeah, you pay for the site, isn't it?
63.	KCB 2302	Or is it good afternoon now, isn't it?
64.	KDE 3831	Yeah, cos anything bigger is gonna get knocked, isn't it?
65.	KC0 8021	for it to be, isn't it?
66.	H49 913	It's all their cars, isn't it?
67.	KBH 42	Well I mean that's what's nice for them, isn't it?
68.	KCF 2179	It's er, [unclear] the best deal they can get like, isn't it?
69.	JYL 315	You've gotta do thirty-six on one floor, thirty-six on another floor, and the next thing that you got is all the information together where all you've got to do is put that, lots of those together and it's er, it's er a shuffling around procedure, isn't it?
70.	KPA 1203	[unclear] that's erm, that's the way comradeship is built, isn't it?
71.	KDM 10736	It's just as nutritious though, isn't it?
72.	KPA 1549	Like a mini town, isn't it?
73.	KBK 6178	Yes I mean if it is possible to provide that huge acreage I mean the space per player or whatever is rather less for croquet than for cricket, isn't it?
74.	KRL 3013	And that's in Saint Mary's Road, isn't it?
75.	JA9 667	Well, three or four weeks, I suppose, isn't it?
76.	KDM 8029	it's still all there, isn't it?
77.	K65 20	And this is in Soham itself, isn't it?
78.	K65 325	Mm that's very heavy, isn't it? yes.
79.	KCV 472	Erm, I think it's the right thing, isn't it?

80.	G4K 1420	sound really false, isn't it?
81.	KBF 1207	It's that's my colour, isn't it?
82.	KBH 2275	It's funny how these things have got their origin, isn't it?
83.	H47 447	Planning, isn't it?
84.	JK1 86	I think that, that, that is, that's almost an insult, isn't it?
85.	J9T 574	Well it's the sector west of the Ouse, isn't it?
86.	KBK 6054	Yes yes and it's fresh air gentle exercise, isn't it?
87.	KBH 3272	That's a special potty too, isn't it?
88.	K74 189	It's like beating a dog, isn't it?
89.	KNF 159	It's like the car alarm, isn't it?
90.	KBD 3620	And practical really, isn't it?
91.	KRP 1716	That's a good bit of jargon, isn't it?
92.	KDM 11692	It's up to here, isn't it?
93.	KBK 2481	It is, it is getting a bit daft, isn't it?
94.	KCV 5563	It is, isn't it? [unclear] enjoy being in an American [unclear]
95.	KB7 8476	round, isn't it? [unclear]
96.	KBK 4509	It's an interesting idea, isn't it? [unclear]
97.	KDE 4038	Oh, that is a pity, isn't it? [unclear]
98.	KPV 3187	We don't need to pay, it's per household, isn't it? [unclear]
99.	KDL 767	That's it, isn't it?
100.	J3X 79	It is nice, isn't it?